



هيئة جودة التعليم والتدريب
Education & Training Quality Authority

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACS	American Credit System
APL	Assessment of Prior Learning
BOD	BQA's Board of Directors
BQA	Education and Training Quality Authority
CQI	Continuous Quality Improvement
DFO	Directorate of National Framework Operations
DHR	Directorate of Higher Education Reviews
DVR	Directorate of Vocational Reviews
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
GDR	General Directorate of Education and Training Institutes Reviews
GDQ	General Directorate of National Qualifications Framework & National Examinations
ILEP	Institutional Listing Evaluation Panel
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LOs	Learning Outcomes
NAC	NQF Advisory Committee
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QDT	Qualification Design Team
QF	Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCET	Supreme Council for the Development of Education and Training

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Access	The process of accepting a learner's enrolment into a specific programme, having met all programme entry requirements while ensuring equality and objectivity.
Alignment of Foreign Qualifications	The process of comparing and evaluating a foreign qualification against the NQF levels.
Archived	The status given to a qualification placed on the NQF which no longer meets NQF or regulatory body requirements. The record of these qualifications is archived for reference purposes.
Assessment	The process of gathering, evaluating, analysing and judging evidence in order to measure whether an individual has achieved the intended learning outcomes, or the performance outcomes set for a specific unit or qualification.
Certification	The formal documentation process that records the successful achievement of a qualification.
Confirmation	An internal process conducted by the institution by which the Confirmation Panel confirms the proposed NQF Level and NQF Credit allocated by the Mapping Panel for a qualification and its comprising units.
Credit Transfer	A process whereby the credits already earned by a learner in one qualification are recognised towards a new qualification.
Credit	The value assigned to the amount or volume of learning required to complete a unit of learning or achieve a qualification.
Formal Learning	Learning that is organised and generally occurs in structured learning environments, whereby the learner's objective is to obtain knowledge, skills, and/or competencies often associated with obtaining a qualification or a certificate. Typical examples are learning that takes place within higher education institutions, training institutions, and schools.

Foreign Qualification	A qualification that is offered and delivered by an institution in the Kingdom of Bahrain, while it belongs to a foreign body which has control over the qualification.
Government Regulatory Body Exempt from Institutional Listing	A ministry or government authority that licenses, regulates or evaluates educational and training institutions in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which owns one or more qualifications it offers or are offered through its affiliate education and training institutions, provided that such qualifications undergo the necessary scrutiny according to the requirements of the DFO as per the BQA regulations.
Informal Learning	Learning that is outside of a structured setting or formal instruction, whereby the learner acquires knowledge, skills, and competencies and is often self-directed. Typical examples are learning which occurs in everyday life through experiences, observations, and interactions.
Institution	An educational or training provider, such as an organisation, company or collaborative partnership, which delivers learning programmes that culminate in specified standards or qualifications.
Institutional Listing	A process by which the DFO ensures that an institution has established suitable formal arrangements to maintain the standards of their qualifications placed/aligned on the NQF. Listing also depends on the quality assurance reviews conducted by the BQA.
Institutional Listing Evaluation Panel (ILEP)	A panel comprising experts with current experience in institutional operations, governance and quality assurance, and a representative from the DFO.
Learners	Individuals who acquire knowledge, skills and competencies through formal, non-formal and informal learning.
Learners with Special Needs	In the context of the NQF, special needs are where the capacity of a learner to participate in or benefit from education is restricted or hindered due to having advantaged or disadvantaged physical, intellectual, social or emotional capabilities.

Learning Outcomes	Statements that describe significant and essential achievement that learners will achieve during a programme, being defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies. Learning outcomes identify what the learner will know and be able to do by the end of a unit, course or programme.
Level Descriptors	A set of progressive statements assigned to each level of the NQF, that describe the complexity of acquired learning in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
Lifelong Learning	Learning that is undertaken throughout life and improves knowledge, skills and competencies within a learner's personal, civic, social and/or employment-related contexts.
Licensing	The process by which an institution gets approval from the relevant regulatory body to provide education or training services.
Listed Institution	An institution attaining the endorsement of the Council of Ministers as a result of satisfying the <i>Institutional Listing Standards</i> .
Mapping	In the context of the NQF, an internal process conducted by the institution by which the Mapping Panel associates an NQF Level and Credit to a qualification and its comprising units.
Micro-credentials (MC)	Micro-credentials are defined as small units of learning with specific characteristics and purpose; their characteristics include a short duration, assessed, based on learning outcomes, credit-based, and the ability to "stack" these credits to form a part of a larger programme and result in certification or digital badges.
National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved. It integrates and coordinates national qualifications sub-systems and improves quality, transparency, access and progression.
NQF Credit Framework	A framework that provides guidelines and design requirements regarding titles, description, the level and credit distribution of national qualifications.

Non-Formal Learning	Learning which is structured and takes place outside the formal education or training systems, but still has specific learning objectives. It is often more flexible than formal learning allowing participant to learn at their own pace, needs, and interests. Non-formal learning does not typically lead to a formal qualification or certification. Examples include training activities, personal development, and community service programmes.
Notional Learning Hours	The time in hours that an average learner would take to successfully complete all learning activities, including assessments, required for achieving the learning outcomes and subsequently achieving a qualification.
NQF Credit	In the context of the NQF, one NQF Credit equates to ten Notional Learning Hours. NQF Credits are used to reflect the volume of units and qualifications (<i>See 'Credit' and 'Notional Learning Hours'</i>).
NQF Level	A class that indicates the complexity of a particular qualification placed at that level, on the basis of the qualification's intended learning outcomes and their fulfilment of the core knowledge, skills and competencies.
Pathways	The vertical and/or horizontal routes learners take to navigate through their learning experience, by building on their knowledge and developing their skills, competencies and life experiences through education and training.
Performance Outcomes	Statements that describe what a learner is able to demonstrate practically using a skill or competence. Performance outcomes may describe different levels of what learners may do to demonstrate the level of competency or conceptualisation of a concept and/or skill they have achieved.
Placed Qualification	A qualification attaining the endorsement of the Cabinet as a result of satisfying the <i>Validation Standards</i> .
Progression	A pathway that learners travel as they progress toward mastery in a subject/discipline.

Qualification	A package of units judged to be worthy of formal recognition in a certificate issued by an institution.
Qualification Design Team	Educationalists or trainers who are involved in designing and developing structures, units, content and assessments of qualifications, programmes or curricula.
Qualification Placement	The process of placing a national qualification of a listed institution on the NQF after fulfilling the qualification placement requirements.
Qualifications System	A broad system that includes all activities that result in the recognition of learning.
Quality Assurance System	A collection of processes and procedures by which an institution ensures that the quality of educational processes is maintained, and the institution is able to satisfy itself and its stakeholders.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	The assessment of an individual's knowledge, skills, and competence acquired through previous Non-formal and Informal Learning, which is used to grant status or credit towards a qualification.
Referencing	The activity of comparing the National Qualifications Framework of the Kingdom of Bahrain to other national, regional or meta qualifications frameworks. Referencing includes comparisons of education and training systems and frameworks levels.
Regulatory Bodies	Bodies that regulate (license and approve) education and training providers within the Kingdom. In some cases, those bodies have set requirements for the institution to follow when developing their qualifications (e.g. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, etc.).
Stakeholder	An individual, a group or an organisation that has interest in, or can be affected by, the NQF operations.
Validation	The process to ensure that a qualification is credible and fit-for-purpose.
Validation Panel	A panel comprising educationalists/trainers and business/industry professionals. Educationalists/trainers are

	academics, educators, teachers and/or trainers with experience in the relevant qualification sector and whom have qualifications of equal or above the level of the qualification being validated. Business/industry professionals are employers or professionals with knowledge and experience of the sector.
Valid Qualification	By satisfying the NQF validation standards a qualification is considered to be current, relevant and fit-for-purpose; hence, a 'Valid Qualification' (See <i>Placed Qualification</i>).
Verification of Assessment	The process that is used to ensure that an institution's assessments are valid and reliable, where (i) Internal Verification refers to the process of internal checks that the institution has in place to ensure the suitability and consistency of assessment, and (ii) External Verification is carried out by independent external verifiers to ensure suitability, consistency and objectivity in assessment decisions.
Verification	The process of ensuring that a qualification's proposed NQF Level and Credit value and its comprising units meet the learning complexity of the NQF level.



Introduction

1. Introduction

☞ This Chapter provides an insight into the context and goals of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), covering the NQF management and governance and introducing the ten-level framework.

1.1. Context and Goals

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of the Kingdom of Bahrain is envisaged to:

- Provide a stronger basis for the understanding, comparison and recognition of national and foreign qualifications, thereby improving the understanding of employers, parents and learners of the value of qualifications.
- Provide fit-for-purpose qualifications that have stronger linkages with labour market and learner needs.
- Increase the accountability of education and training institutions towards maintaining high quality standards in their provisions.
- Improve the opportunities for mobility and progression of learners within and across higher education, vocational and general education sectors.
- Promote the concept of lifelong learning through the recognition of all types of learning: formal, non-formal and informal.

1.2. Management and Governance

In 2012, Royal Decree NO. (83) stated Education & Training Authority (BQA) as the body responsible for managing and maintaining the NQF in addition to its original responsibilities. The BQA structure consists of two General Directorates, the General Directorate of Education and Training Institutes Reviews (GDR) and the General Directorate of National Qualifications Framework & National Examination (GDQ). The Directorate of National Framework Operations (DFO) within the GDQ is responsible for all the operations related to the NQF.

The NQF Advisory Committee (NAC) was established by the Cabinet Resolution No. 52 of 2013. The Advisory Committee is chaired by the BQA's Chief Executive and includes representatives from the Ministry of Education, Higher Education Council, Civil Service Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Government Universities, Private Universities, Private Institutes and the Private Sector. The Advisory Committee oversees all NQF activities, particularly the recommendation of policies related to the Institutional Listing and Qualifications Placement; these are presented to them after they are quality assured internally in BQA. The resulting recommended policies and

operations are presented to the BQA's Board of Directors (BOD) for approval and then endorsed by the Cabinet.

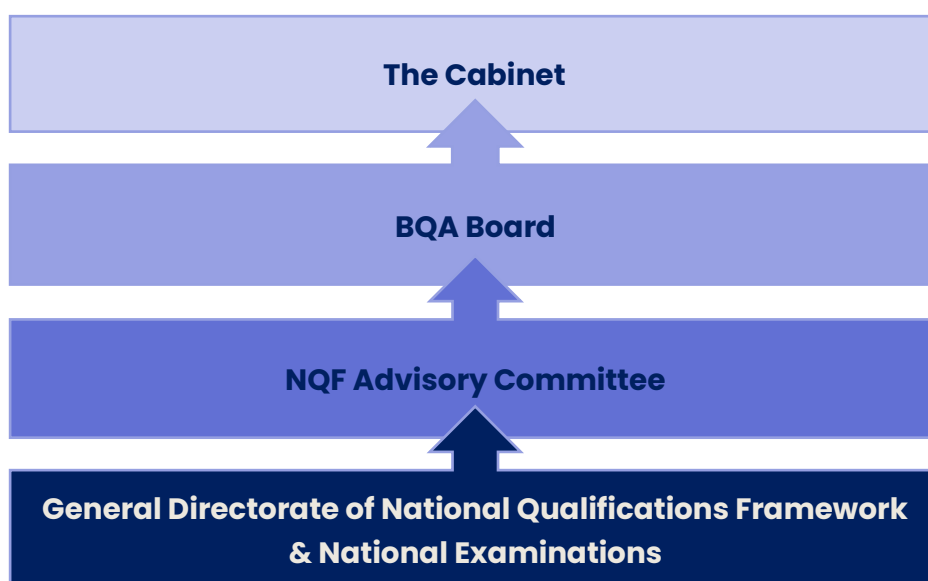


Figure 1. Governance of the NQF

1.3. Introducing the Framework

The NQF is a mandatory qualifications framework as stipulated by Royal Decree 83 of 2012:

“All Education and Training institutions are required to coordinate with the BQA to place their qualifications on the NQF, in accordance with BQA’s regulations” (Royal Decree 83, 2012).

The NQF is a learning outcome-based qualifications framework comprehensive of all education and training sectors and all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal learning. The NQF comprises ten levels, each being identified by a unique set of *Level Descriptors*. In order to place a qualification on an NQF level, the learning outcomes (LOs) of each unit comprising a qualification and the overall qualification learning outcomes are mapped against these *Level Descriptors*. At each level, the *Level Descriptors* are classified into three separate strands (categories) covering *Knowledge, Skills* and *Competence*. The strands are further divided into five sub-strands as shown in **Figure 2**. Figure 3 provides an overview of the framework with indication of qualifications at each level.

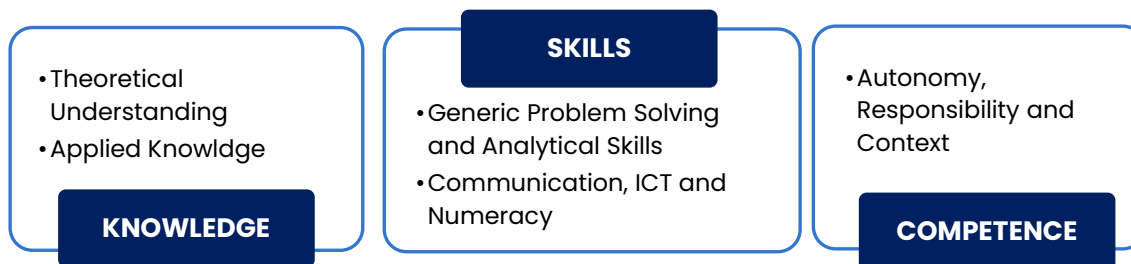


Figure 2. Overview of NQF Strands: Knowledge, Skills and Competence



Figure 3. The Level Typology of the NQF



NQF General Policies

2. NQF General Policies

🔗 This chapter details NQF General Policies, confirming the roles and responsibilities of core stakeholders involved in the implementation of the NQF.

2.1 POLICY 1: Listing Institutions in the NQF Register

Institutions are required to be listed in the NQF Register prior to submitting their qualifications for placement on the NQF.

2.1.1 Purpose

- To identify institutions that are eligible to have their qualifications placed on the NQF.
- To ensure that institutions which provide qualifications placed on the NQF have established suitable and transparent operational mechanisms to maintain the standards of their qualifications.
- To ensure that institutions are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the Institutional Listing process.

2.1.2 Policy Statements

1. Institutions must comply with eligibility criteria and Institutional Listing Standards in order to be eligible to have their qualifications placed on the NQF. Those criteria and standards must be clearly defined and published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook.
2. The GDQ must process all applications for Institutional Listing in a fair, transparent and consistent manner, that is fit-for-purpose and which embraces international good practice.
3. Prior to submitting qualifications for placement on the NQF, an institution must be listed in the NQF Register. An institution is deemed to become 'listed' when:
 - it meets all Institutional Listing Standards
 - it has passed its quality review conducted by the GDR, if applicable¹. However, newly established institutions that have not been reviewed by GDR may be listed solely against the NQF Institutional Listing Standards.

¹ Some institutions are not included within the review scope of BQA.

4. An institution maintains its status as being 'Listed', if it passes its institutional review, conducted by GDR, including the embedded Institutional Listing Standards with the review framework.
5. Institutions have the right to appeal the outcome of their Institutional Listing application in accordance with the BQA's policies and procedures.
6. The GDQ will change the status of a 'listed' institution, including its 'placed' qualifications, to 'archived' when it does not pass its periodic review.

2.2 POLICY 2: Qualifications Compliance with NQF Requirements

Qualifications placed on the NQF must comply with NQF and regulatory bodies' requirements.

2.2.1 Purpose

- To ensure that qualifications placed on the NQF comply with requirements and criteria set by the relevant regulatory body, where applicable.
- To identify the qualifications that are eligible for placement on the NQF.
- To ensure that qualifications placed on the NQF have common design criteria across education and training sectors, which promotes lifelong learning and supports progression of learners between sectors.
- To ensure that institutions use quality-assured and fit-for-purpose processes for Mapping and Confirmation.

2.2.2 Policy Statements

1. An institution must ensure that any qualification submitted for placement on the NQF complies with the relevant regulatory body requirements and criteria, where applicable.
2. A qualification must comply with NQF eligibility criteria in order for it to be considered for placement on the NQF.
3. Qualifications eligibility and design criteria must be clearly defined and published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook.
4. Institutions must follow the qualifications mapping and confirmation processes declared within the submission for institutional listing.

2.3 POLICY 3: Qualification Placement on the NQF

All national qualifications are placed on the NQF according to the process for 'Qualification Placement'.

2.3.1 Purpose

- To ensure that institutions are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the 'Qualification Placement' process.
- To ensure that the role and responsibilities of the GDQ in the placement process are clear and transparent, and that the arrangements for placing a qualification on the NQF, or archiving it, are defined, transparent and published.
- To set consistent methods for allocation and validation of NQF Level and NQF Credit.

2.3.2 Policy Statements

1. Institutions are required to submit all eligible qualifications to the GDQ for placement on the NQF. The eligibility criteria must be clearly defined and published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook.
2. The GDQ must process all qualification placement applications in a transparent, fair and consistent manner that embraces international good practice.
3. Institutions are required to submit documentation and evidence to support their Qualification Placement applications.
4. The Level Descriptors, along with provided rationales, form the basis for allocating the NQF Level of each unit within any given qualification. The overall NQF Level of a qualification is determined by considering the NQF Levels of comprising units.
5. The GDQ must verify the proposed NQF Level and NQF Credit of a qualification and its comprising units, as well as verifying the qualification's compliance with the NQF requirements (*see Policy 2*).
6. The GDQ must ensure that all submitted qualifications for placement on the NQF are subject to a validation process (*see Policy 4*).
7. Placed Qualifications will be archived if they:
 - are no longer valid (i.e. do not satisfy the Validation Standards);
 - are discontinued and no longer delivered by the institution; or
 - do not pass its periodic GDR's quality review.

8. Institutions have the right to appeal the outcome of their application for qualification placement on the NQF, in accordance with the BQA's policies.

2.4 POLICY 4: Validation of Qualifications

All qualifications placed on the NQF must be validated to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and meet Validation Standards.

2.4.1 Purpose

- To ensure that qualifications placed on the NQF are fit for-purpose and meet the needs of learners or the labour market.
- To ensure that the validation standards, process and roles of validators are defined and transparent.

2.4.2 Policy Statements

1. A *Validation Panel* of professionals and educators/trainers ensures that each qualification – including its comprising units – meets the Validation Standards.
2. The GDQ is responsible for overseeing validation events and the selection of *Validation Panel* members. Panel members must be selected in a transparent and objective manner.
3. The *Validation Panel* shall only judge the validity of a qualification using the Validation Standards published by the BQA in the NQF Handbook. The Panel assigns a Validity Period for every valid qualification.
4. During the Validity Period, the GDQ monitors all qualifications placed on the NQF. Accordingly, institutions must maintain the qualifications' content and standards and are responsible for communicating any changes to the GDQ.
5. Qualifications will be subject to re-validation when:
 - they have passed their Validity Period; or
 - any changes occur that might affect the NQF Level or NQF Credit verified for a qualification or its constituent parts.

2.5 POLICY 5: Enabling Learners with Special Needs

Enabling learners with special needs by integrating them within the education and training systems and recognising their achievements on the NQF.

2.5.1 Purpose

- To provide equal and suitable opportunities for the integration and access of learners with special needs within the education and training programmes, and recognition of their achievements.
- To encourage institutions to develop, and place on the NQF, qualifications specifically designed for learners with special needs.

2.5.2 Policy Statements

1. Institutions should wherever possible provide learners with special needs with suitable support and resources and ensure their integration and recognition of achievements.
2. Institutions are encouraged to develop, where appropriate, qualifications specifically targeted at learners with special needs in order to expand their learning and increase their employment opportunities. These qualifications must also comply with NQF requirements (*see Policies 2, 3 and 4*).
3. The GDQ must ensure that institutions provide learners with special needs with suitable support and resources for all qualifications.

2.6 POLICY 6: Promoting Lifelong Learning

Promoting the concept of Lifelong Learning, which aims to recognise prior learning, and to further enhance progression pathways between education and training sectors.

2.6.1 Purpose

- To promote the concept of Lifelong Learning within the Qualifications System of the Kingdom of Bahrain, by enhancing progression pathways between education and training sectors and developing a common understanding of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the context of the NQF.
- To promote the value of prior learning achievement as being on equal terms with formal learning.
- To provide guidance to institutions in developing mechanisms for RPL in accordance with the current education and training regulations.

2.6.2 Policy Statements

1. The GDQ will develop and promote a common understanding of RPL in the context of the NQF, alongside valuing prior learning achievement on equal terms with formal learning.
2. The GDQ must ensure that Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) is the mechanism used to recognise prior learning, ensuring that the outcome of APL meets the identified standards of the relevant qualification.
3. The GDQ will provide guidelines for institutions to establish mechanisms for the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, in accordance with current educational and training regulations within the Kingdom of Bahrain.

2.7 POLICY 7: Communication and National Cooperation

Communication and national cooperation is essential for raising public awareness about the aims, benefits and principles of the NQF, and for ensuring the readiness of institutions to implement it.

2.7.1 Purpose

- To raise public awareness about the aims, benefits, and principles governing the NQF, and promote its usage and application.
- To ensure that all policies, guidelines and publications governing the NQF are available, accessible and updated.
- To ensure the readiness of institutions for all NQF-related operations, particularly Institutional Listing and Qualifications Placement.
- To maintain an up-to-date NQF register (database) that includes all listed institutions along with all qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF.
- To engage and communicate with regulatory bodies and stakeholders, with the aim of implementation and improvement of the NQF.

2.7.2 Policy Statements

1. The GDQ will take initiatives to raise public awareness, to promote and support the usage and understanding of the NQF.
2. The GDQ must provide appropriate support and, capacity building sessions to ensure the readiness of institutions to carry out NQF-related activities, particularly Institutional Listing and Qualifications Placement, and to equip the

staff within institutions who are involved in qualification design, development and quality assurance with the required and appropriate skills.

3. The GDQ must ensure that all policies, guidelines and publications governing the NQF are-up-to date, available and accessible to all stakeholders.
4. The GDQ will maintain and update the NQF Register, which includes listed institutions along with qualifications placed on, or aligned to, the NQF.
5. The GDQ should engage with regulatory bodies and stakeholders with the aim of implementing and enhancing the NQF.

2.8 POLICY 8: Referencing the NQF

Referencing the NQF is an activity that leads to international recognition for the national qualifications.

2.8.1 Purpose

- To achieve international recognition of the NQF, including the placed qualifications.
- To ensure that referencing mechanisms are set and defined between the organisations involved.
- To ensure that referencing reports are available and published.

2.8.2 Policy Statements

1. The BQA is responsible for facilitating referencing activities in collaboration with relevant national and international organisations, to achieve international recognition of the NQF including the placed qualifications.
2. As the scope and aims of referencing activities may vary considerably, the GDQ will identify suitable qualifications frameworks and key organisations and will determine the scope and aims of any referencing activities.
3. The BQA must develop and publish referencing guidelines that are fit-for-purpose and in line with international good practice.
4. The BQA must ensure that referencing reports are available and published.

2.9 POLICY 9: Alignment of Foreign Qualifications

Alignment of foreign qualifications enhances the comparability between foreign and national qualifications.

2.9.1 Purpose

- To ensure that the mechanisms for qualification alignment to the NQF are specified and transparent.

2.9.2 Policy Statements

1. The GDQ can align foreign qualifications to the NQF if they meet the alignment standards.
2. The BQA must publish the alignment standards and procedures.
3. The GDQ must process all applications for aligning foreign qualifications to the NQF in a transparent and consistent manner that is fit-for-purpose and embraces international good practice.

2.10 POLICY 10: Continuous Quality Improvement

Continuous Quality Improvement will ensure the value and credibility of the NQF and its relevance to education and training requirements within the Kingdom of Bahrain.

2.10.1 Purpose

- To ensure that the structure, typology, values and characteristics of the NQF are maintained and benchmarked against international standards.
- To ensure that Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is the backbone of the NQF operations.
- To maintain the qualification standards placed on the NQF and the credibility and value of the NQF.

2.10.2 Policy statements

1. The GDQ will maintain, benchmark and continuously improve the NQF structure, typology and values through the evaluation of international standards and adaptation to the developments of the education and training systems.

2. The GDQ periodically reviews all NQF-related policies, processes and procedures, taking into consideration the views of relevant stakeholders.
3. The GDQ aims to continuously improve the quality of its standards in all aspects of the NQF operations and must ensure effective time management in processing applications through defined key performance indicators (KPIs).
4. Institutions listed in the NQF Register must ensure effective application of their internal quality assurance mechanisms in order to maintain their qualification standards and the credibility and value of the NQF.



Institutional Listing

3. Institutional Listing

☞ This Chapter details the process of listing institutions in the NQF Register. The institutional listing process and standards are designed to be applicable to all education and training institutions.

3.1 Introduction

Education and training institutions should have suitable governance and operational structures to ensure that learning is occurring in a robust environment. The *Institutional Listing Standards* of the NQF are an agreed set of indicators that institutions must meet to ensure the quality of their learning environment and qualifications. All education and training institutions in the Kingdom of Bahrain are required to be listed in the NQF Register prior to submitting their qualifications for placement on/or alignment to the NQF.

3.2 Eligibility Criteria for Institutions

Education and training institutions delivering qualifications in the Kingdom of Bahrain are required to conform to the *Institutional Listing Standards* and apply to become *Listed* in the NQF Register. *Institutional Listing Applications* will only be considered eligible if the institution:

1. has a valid licence/approval issued by a regulatory body² (e.g. Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, Higher Education Council, etc.)
2. has passed its quality assurance review conducted by the GDR, where applicable³. However, newly established institutions that have not yet been reviewed by the GDR may be listed solely against the NQF *Institutional Listing Standards*.
3. offers qualifications that meet the NQF *Qualification Design Requirements*.

Institutions are expected to use the above criteria to assess their eligibility before submitting an *Institutional Listing Application*.

Government regulatory bodies could be exempt from the *Institutional Listing* process, provided that they undergo the necessary scrutiny according to the

² Some institutions are established by other legal instruments e.g. Decree, Resolution, etc.

³ Some institutions are not included within the quality assurance review scope of BQA.

requirements of the DFO as per the BQA regulations. While these bodies could be exempt from the *Institutional Listing* process, their offered qualifications have to undergo a validation process. (see *NQF General Policy 3&4*).

3.3 Institutional Listing Standards

Applicant institutions are required to provide evidence substantiating their compliance with the *Institutional Listing Standards*. These *Standards* are designed to ensure that institutions offering qualifications have set suitable and transparent operational mechanisms in place to maintain the standards of their learning environment and qualifications. There are five *Institutional Listing Standards*, each comprises a set of indicators as follows:

Standard 1: Access, Transfer, and Progression

- **Indicator 1.1. Access and Admission.** The institution should have formal arrangements⁴ relating to access and admission of learners to programmes leading to the qualifications. The admission process must be transparent, adhering to regulatory body requirements and ensuring the fairness of criteria and requirements, with consideration of adjustment to learners with special needs (*i.e. an official mechanism for the access and admission, application/admission form template, samples of filled out application/admission form, programme admission criteria, evidence of the identification of special needs learners during the admission stage, and evidence of the adjustment provided to learners with special needs*).
- **Indicator 1.2. Credit Accumulation.** The institution should have formal arrangements relating to credit accumulation. The institution may use credit systems such as the European, American systems or NQF Credits to measure the volume of learning awarded for achieving the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) of the units and the overall qualification. Credit points accumulate throughout the programme based on passing the programme's units. The institution should have an official document to record the accumulated credits. The institution has to provide details about the number

⁴ Formal Arrangements could be policies, procedures, bylaws, handbooks or manuals. The submitted formal arrangements for all indicators should include a clear description of the process's steps, the timeframe, the stakeholders involved, and their roles and responsibilities. The institution could submit the same formal arrangement for one or more indicator as long as it covers the indicator's requirements. All formal arrangements should be communicated to their target users. Evidence on the implementation is required in case the formal arrangement is already implemented.

of credits required to achieve a qualification. (*i.e. an official mechanism of credit accumulation and learners' achievements records/transcripts*).

- **Indicator 1.3. Internal and External Credit Transfer.** The institution should have formal arrangements relating to internal and external credit transfer. These arrangements should ensure that repetition of achieved credits is not required when learners move from one programme to another within the same institution or from other institutions. The institution has to provide clear guidelines for the minimum and maximum credits, and grades allowed for the credit transfer process (*i.e. an official mechanism for internal and external credit transfer, internal and external credit transfer guidelines, internal and external credit transfer forms, and samples of internal and external credit transfer cases*).
- **Indicator 1.4. Career Progression and Learning Pathways.** The institution should have formal arrangements relating to identifying clear progression routes for learners to pursue further education or employment. The institution should ensure that learners are given the opportunity to exit a programme at a given level and progress to another, specifying achieved learning. The institution has to support the development of progression routes by offering learning and career guidance and counselling to learners and creating opportunities for learners to meet any progression, access or transfer criteria. The institution should have formal arrangements for tracking of the qualification's graduates per cohort, with particular emphasis on the employability rates, job type, employability timing and/or skills enhancements. (*i.e. an official mechanism to ensure learner's career progression and educational pathways, career guidance and counselling policy and/or procedure, evidence of having the practice of identifying and documenting the career progression and the educational pathways for the offered qualifications and samples of career guidance and counselling provided to learners*).
- **Indicator 1.5. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).** The institution should have formal and transparent arrangements for the RPL that follow the NQF guidelines and complies to the education and training regulations, where applicable. The formal arrangements should include information on how to identify learning outcomes; document and record credit achieved by learners through formal, non-formal or informal learning; adopt the appropriate Assessment of Prior Learning (APL); publish information on RPL opportunities; and ensure providing appropriate guidance and counselling to learners (*i.e. an official mechanism for RPL, RPL form template, samples of filled RPL forms and evidence of implementing RPL, where applicable*).
- **Indicator 1.6. Appeal Against Access and Transfer.** The institution should have transparent formal arrangements relating to appeal against access and transfer decisions. These arrangements should ensure that learners

have the opportunity to appeal the denial of access or transfer to a programme. (*i.e. an official mechanism for appeal against access and transfer, appeal against access and transfer form template, and evidence on appeal against access and transfer cases*).

Standard 2: Qualification Development, Approval and Review

- **Indicator 2.1. Justification of Need.** The institution should have formal arrangements for developing qualifications linked to the labour market, learners, societal or legal needs based on trusted and recent data sources. The institution should also have a mechanism/s for continuously identifying and maintaining the qualification's rationale based on the stakeholders' feedback (*i.e. an official mechanism for identifying and maintaining the qualification rationale, an official mechanism for collecting the stakeholders' feedback, an official mechanism for conducting training need analysis and evidence on implementing the aforementioned mechanisms, where applicable*)
- **Indicator 2.2. Qualification Design.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the design of qualifications. The process of designing a qualification includes identifying the programme structure and the units' content, articulating the ILOs, and deciding on the attendance mode (part-time or full time) and the delivery mode (on-campus, online or blended). The arrangements should ensure that the proposed design is developed based on actual and tangible need and is aligned/benchmarked with related national, regional or international standards or similar qualifications. External subject experts may be involved in the qualification development process (*i.e. an official mechanism for the qualification design, templates of the forms used for the qualification design, filled out samples of the forms used, and minutes of meeting(s) discussing any qualification design*).
- **Indicator 2.3. Qualification Compliance.** The institution should have formal arrangements to ensure that qualifications design complies with regulatory body requirements and the NQF design requirements, such as having an appropriate structure, expressed in units/modules, having ILOs at the programme and the unit level and having a suitable arrangement for mapping and confirmation processes. These arrangements should also ensure having mapping and confirmation panels that are independent of each other, state roles and responsibilities of each panel, and ensure that panels' members are familiar with the NQF requirements and the credit framework specifications in terms of qualification's title and credits requirements, and with the use of NQF level descriptors (*i.e. an official*

mechanism for ensuring the compliance of the qualification, evidence of the compliance with the regulatory body requirements, the institution licence, sample of a qualification licence, mapping and conformation panels terms of reference and mapping and confirmation policy and/or procedure).

- **Indicator 2.4. Learning Resources and Learners' Support.** The institution should have formal arrangements to ensure that appropriate and adequate levels of learning resources, Information Communication and Technology (ICT) resources, and physical infrastructure are provided and maintained to support learners' achievement of ILOs, considering the specified programme attendance and delivery modes. A clear plan for learner support should exist, especially in case of online and blended learning (*i.e. an official mechanism for identifying and tracking learning resources, an official mechanism for identifying and maintaining learners support and forms/templates or logs used to identify and track the learning resources*).
- **Indicator 2.5. Qualification Internal Approval.** The institution should have formal arrangements for internal approval of qualifications. These arrangements ensure that the design of the proposed qualification is internally checked and approved against a set of documented and agreed qualification approval criteria, before being forwarded to the regulatory body approval/ licence. They should also indicate the layers of approval and the members and/or committees involved (*i.e. an official mechanism for qualification approval, criteria for internal qualification approval, and templates/ filled forms used for the internal qualification approval*).
- **Indicator 2.6. Qualification Internal and External Evaluation and Review.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the post-delivery evaluation of the qualification and its comprising units, and the internal and external review of the qualification. These arrangements should include details related to collecting, analysing and utilising the stakeholders' feedback and involving them as part of the periodic review. They should also include the frequency and scope of evaluation and review activities. Internal and external qualification reviews have to focus on the validity and accuracy of the ILOs and the extent to which learners achieve them, evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum, teaching/training and assessment. The institution has to ensure that formal arrangements are in place to follow-up on the outcomes of the internal and external reviews (*i.e. an official mechanism for collecting stakeholders' feedback, an official mechanism for the internal and external review of the qualification, templates/ filled forms and reports used for the internal and external review of the qualification,*

criteria for the internal and external review of the qualification, evidence of implementing the aforementioned mechanisms, where applicable).

Standard 3: Assessment Design and Moderation

- **Indicator 3.1. Assessment Design.** The institution should have formal arrangements for assessment design. These arrangements should ensure that assessment methods are designed to adequately cover the ILOs and match their level of complexity and are following the guidelines stated in the institution's assessment policy. A clear mapping between the ILOs and assessment must exist. Assessment design should be appropriate for the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. an official mechanism for assessment design, guidelines for assessment design, samples of assessment at different units' level, assessment cover page showing the mapping between the ILOs, and units specifications/ syllabi or outlines showing the mapping between ILOs and assessment*).
- **Indicator 3.2. Internal and External Verification and Moderation of Assessment.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the internal and external verification and moderation of assessment. These arrangements should ensure that the assessment design is checked prior to the delivery of the assessment to guarantee that it is fit-for-purpose and match the complexity of the ILOs (*i.e. an official mechanism for the internal and external verification of assessment, template/ samples of internal and external verification forms or reports for units at different levels and list of external verifiers*). The formal arrangements should also ensure that the assessment is being fairly and consistently marked across all learners after conducting the assessment (*i.e. an official mechanism for the internal and external moderation of assessment results, template/ samples of internal and external moderation forms or reports for units at different levels and list of external moderators*). They should also include the frequency and scope of the verification and moderation activities and the criteria for selecting the external verifier/s and moderators.
- **Indicator 3.3. Marking Criteria.** The institution should have formal arrangements for developing and using marking criteria. The arrangements should ensure that the assessment is marked based on pre-set and published marking criteria, rubrics, marking schemes or answers keys (*i.e. an official mechanism for developing and using marking criteria samples of marking criteria, rubrics, marking schemes and answer keys*).
- **Indicator 3.4. Measuring the Achievement of Learning Outcomes.** The institution should have formal arrangements for measuring the achievement of ILOs. The arrangements should state the mechanism used to assess the learners' achievement and ensure the achievement of ILOs, and ensure

taking improvement actions when not achieved, taking into account the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. an official mechanism for measuring the ILOs, ILOs measurement matrices, ILOs measurement reports, action plan based on ILOs measurement*).

- **Indicator 3.5. Feedback to Learners.** The institution should have formal arrangements for feedback to learners. The arrangements should ensure that learners receive feedback on their assessed achievements and are informed on their progress in the programme in a timely, constructive and appropriate manner that is adequate to the purpose and type of assessment (formative or summative), taking into account the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. an official mechanism for feedback to learners, samples of marked assessment for units at different levels, feedback forms/ reports templates*).
- **Indicator 3.6. Approval of Assessment Results.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the approval of assessment results. The arrangements ensure that the assessment results are checked and approved against a set of documented and agreed approval criteria. They should also indicate the layers of approval and the members and/or committees involved (*i.e. an official mechanism for approval of assessment result, approval of assessment results criteria, and templates/ filled forms used for the approval of assessment results*).
- **Indicator 3.7. Appeal Against Assessment Results.** The institution should have formal arrangements relating to appeal against assessment results. These arrangements should ensure that learners have the opportunity to appeal against the assessment result. Learners should be aware of their right to appeal against result. (*i.e. an official mechanism for appeal against assessment result, samples of appeal against assessment result forms, and evidence on appeal against assessment result cases*).
- **Indicator 3.8. Integrity of Assessment.** The institution should have formal arrangements relating to the integrity of assessment. The arrangements should ensure the integrity of the assessment, including identification, reporting and resolving cases of plagiarism and other academic misconduct. Clear and specific arrangements should be in place to ensure assessment integrity whether the programme is delivered face to face, online or blended. A set of penalties should be in place that is fair and proportionate, and the institution has to ensure that these are applied fairly and consistently (*i.e. an official mechanism for ensuring assessment integrity, plagiarism reports and samples of misconducts cases*).

- **Indicator 3.9. Security of Assessment Documents and Records.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the security of assessment documents and records. The arrangements should ensure the protection and integrity of assessment documents (hard and soft copies), materials and learners' assessment records; identify the access rights to them and detail any backup, recovery and record retention plans, taking into account the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. an official mechanism for the security of assessment documents and records; backup, recovery and distortion plan, and access right log*).

Standard 4: Certification

- **Indicator 4.1. Certificate Issuance.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the certification issuance. The arrangements should ensure that the learner's certificate is issued based on pre-defined criteria, including learners' achievement of learning outcomes and fulfilling the qualification graduation requirements. They should also ensure the certification adherence to any national standards or requirements. In addition, the NQF Level and Credit values should be stated in the certificate and/or the transcript issued by the institution (*i.e. an official mechanism for certificate issuance, criteria for certificate issuance, template/sample of a certificate, and template/sample of transcript*).
- **Indicator 4.2. Certificate Authentication.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the certificate authentication. The arrangements should ensure that learner's certificate is genuine and protected against fraud, through having authentication measures such as having serial number, stamp, seal, using special papers or other advanced technologies. (*i.e. an official mechanism for certificate authentication, template/sample of a certificate, and template/sample of transcript*).
- **Indicator 4.3. Records of Certification.** The institution should have a reliable and secure system for storing and maintaining records of issued certificates. It should also have formal arrangements to identify the access rights to learners' certificates and to detail any backup, recovery and record retention plans. In addition, it should include details on the institution's mechanism for issuing lost certificates (*i.e. certification system manual, certificate records, certificate log, and access log*).

Standard 5: Sustainability and Continuous Quality Improvement

- **Indicator 5.1. Institution Quality Assurance System.** The institution should have a comprehensive quality assurance (QA) system which identifies all the QA activities conducted to improve the institutions' main processes

(teaching/training, learning and assessment), including those related to the Institutional Listing Standards. It should also identify the staff involved in these activities, along with their roles and responsibilities. The institution may use an electronic system to manage and control the QA activities (*i.e. quality assurance manual, institutions' policies and procedures, structure/description of the QA department/section, description of the QA activities in the institution*).

- **Indicator 5.2. Continuous Improvement of Institution Quality Assurance System.** The institution should have formal arrangements for the continuous improvement of the institution's QA system. The arrangements should include a mechanism for collecting information and reflecting on the effectiveness of the institution's main processes (teaching/training, learning and assessment), including NQF requirements through regular review activities. The institution should also have a predefined timeframe to review and update all of its governing policies and procedures (*i.e. an official mechanism for collecting stakeholders' feedback on the institution processes, an official mechanism for reviewing the institution QA system, evidence on the implementation of the aforementioned mechanism, and timeframe for updating the QA manual and the institution's policies and procedures*).
- **Indicator 5.3 Risk and Crisis Management.** The institution should have risk and crisis management plan to ensure the continuity and sustainability of its operations. This plan should also consider how to maintain the value of the offered qualifications under such circumstances. (*i.e. risk/crisis management plan, and risk/crisis management guidelines*).

3.4 Annual Planning & Scheduling

Prior to submitting the *Institutional Listing Application Form*, institutions would be invited on an annual basis to fill in the NQF Annual Planning Survey with their application details to be considered as part of the DFO processing schedule for the upcoming academic year. Survey forms received would be considered based on the DFO processing capacity. Institutions will only be considered eligible for scheduling as per the Institutional Listing eligibility criteria (see Section 3.2). In cases of institutions that are not yet listed while scheduled for GDR reviews (Directorate of Higher Education Reviews (DHR) or Directorate of Vocational Reviews (DVR)), they will be evaluated for listing following the GDR (DHR or DVR) review procedure, where the IL judgment would be based on the review judgment.

3.5 Capacity Building

The DFO supports the education and training institutions through capacity building, prior to the submission of the *Institutional Listing Applications*.

3.6 Institutional Listing Process

The institutional listing process starts at the institution, with the preparation and submission of the *Institutional Listing Application*. Each application is evaluated by a panel of experts to determine whether the submission meets the *Institutional Listing Standards*. The institutional listing process is illustrated in **Figure 4**, while **Table 1** shows the estimated time required for each step in processing an Institutional Listing Application.

Table 1. Processing duration for Institutional Listing Applications

	Step	Duration (<i>number of working days</i>)
1	Acknowledgement	Two
2	Institutional Listing Application Processing	20
3	Site Visit ⁵	One
4	Institutional Listing Report finalisation by Panel, internal quality assurance and factual accuracy	15

⁵ Site visits are conducted as required and could be by arrangement with the GDR.

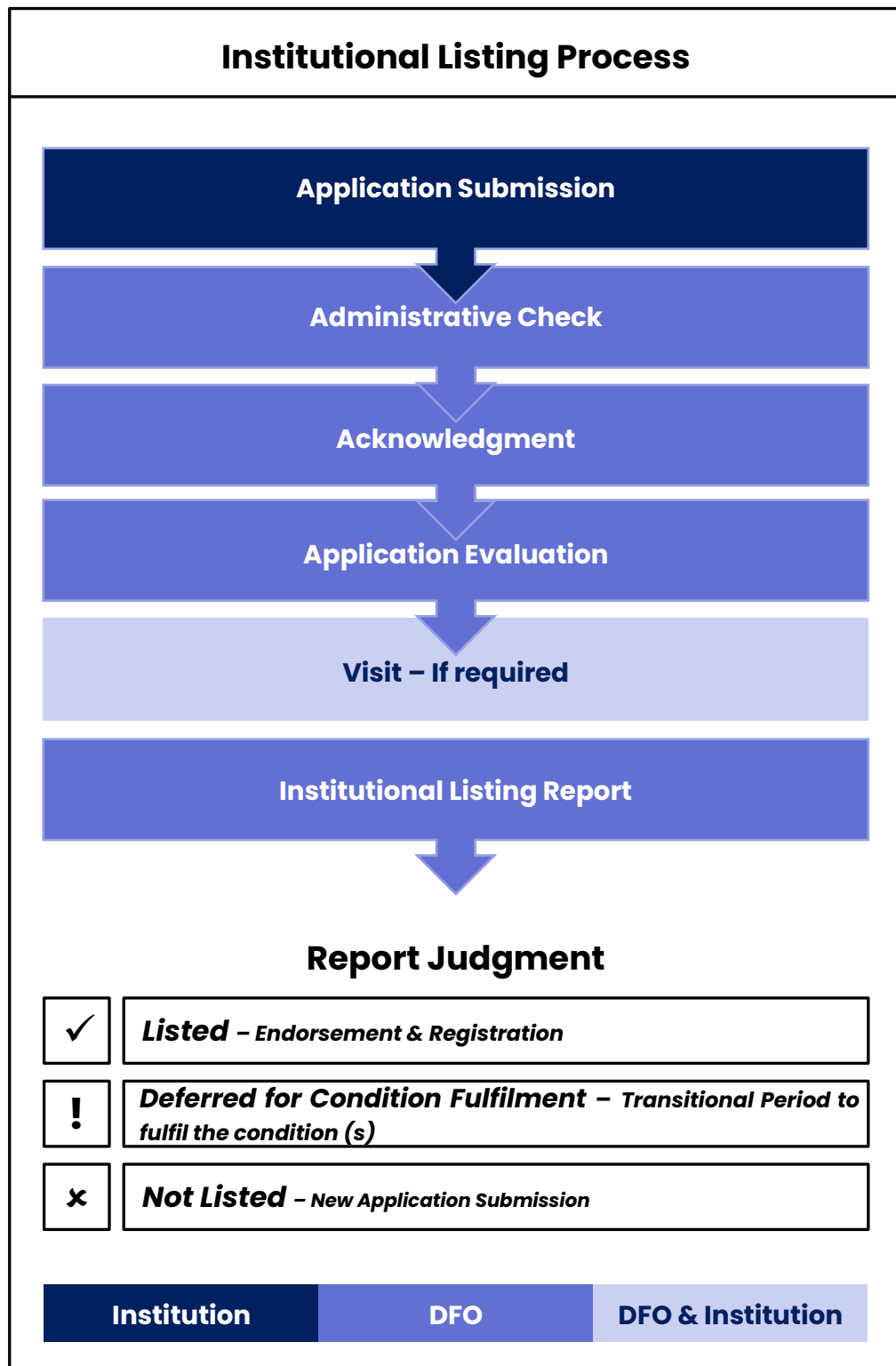


Figure 4. Illustration of the Institutional Listing Process

3.6.1 Preparing and Submitting an Institutional Listing Application

An institutional listing submission includes the *Institutional Listing Application* in addition to supporting evidence satisfying the *Institutional Listing Standards*. Before submitting the *Institutional Listing Application Form*, institutions must complete the service charge payment, following *BQA Service Charge Guidelines*. The Institution should also review the application and ensure that it is free of error/s and include proper evidence indexing before submitting it to the DFO along with the supporting material in an electronic format. Where institutions are scheduled for joint IL evaluation with GDR reviews, the evaluation would be conducted based on the documents submitted to the GDR (DHR or DVR).

3.6.2 Administrative Check

Once the *Institutional Listing Application* is received, the DFO will proceed to check the application considering the following:

- the eligibility of the institution (see Section 3.2)
- the completeness and clarity of the application and associated documentation.

Where key documents are found to be missing or incomplete, the applicant institution will be contacted and requested to supply the required information or evidence within an agreed deadline. Where the quality of the application after the administrative check is not up to the expected standard⁶, or the institution is not co-operating with the DFO in submitting the required information or evidence within the agreed deadlines, the DFO reserves the right not to acknowledge the application receipt.

3.6.3 Acknowledgement

Upon completing the *administrative check* requirements, the DFO will send an acknowledgement of receipt to the institution within two working days. The purpose of this acknowledgement is to advise the institution of the receipt date of the *Institutional Listing Application*.

3.6.4 Application Evaluation

Once an *Institutional Listing Application* has passed the administrative check, it will be reviewed by an *Institutional Listing Evaluation Panel* (ILEP). The ILEP is a panel

⁶ These include applications with improper evidence indexing, irrelevant supporting materials, inconsistencies in information across submitted materials and applications that still miss major requirements after submitting the administrative check requirements.

comprising experts with current experience in institutional operations, governance and quality assurance. The ILEP size is determined by the expertise required to review the specific application.

The *Institutional Listing Application* evaluation by ILEP involves a number of key steps, namely:

- appointment of ILEP members, whose profiles are sent to the applicant institution to ensure that there is no conflict of interest with the appointed members
- signing of a declaration on confidentiality and non-conflict of interest by all ILEP members
- circulation of materials required for evaluating the Institutional Listing Application to ILEP members. Upon receiving the materials, the ILEP members are responsible for maintaining the security and confidentiality of the received material
- agreement with the institution on a date for the site visit⁷, if required. (see Section 3.4.5)
- preparation of the report and the signing off the report (see Section 3.4.6).

ILEP members are appointed and approved as per BQA procedures. To meet the need for experts, the BQA has established a database of approved experts covering a range of sectors and specialisations. All experts are trained by the DFO on NQF-related policies and procedures and the use of *Institutional Listing Standards*.

The Panel will evaluate the application and supporting evidence and decide whether the applicant institution meets the *Institutional Listing Standards*. An *Institutional Listing Report* is then prepared summarising the Panel's decision and findings. A judgement will be provided for each standard, as described in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Institutional Listing Standards Judgements

JUDGEMENT		
MET	PARTIALLY MET	NOT MET
The <i>Institutional Listing Standard</i> is sufficiently addressed (No condition/s in all indicators) by the institution, as	The <i>Institutional Listing Standard</i> is partially addressed by the institution, as evidenced by the submitted formal arrangements.	The <i>Institutional Listing Standard</i> is not addressed (two thirds or more of the indicators have conditions) by the institution, as

⁷ Site visits may be conducted upon arrangements with GDR. Site visit might be conducted virtually according to the ILEP recommendations.

evidenced by the submitted formal arrangements.	ILEP will require the applicant institution to fulfil all stated conditions within a specified timeframe.	evidenced by the submitted formal arrangements. ILEP will indicate those aspects that need to be developed or revised to meet the <i>Institutional Listing Standard</i> .
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Once each standard receives a judgement, the ILEP must reach an overall judgement on the *Institutional Listing Application* as described in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Overall Institutional Listing Judgement

Listed	For an institution to be <i>Listed</i> , all five Institutional Listing Standards must be <i>Met</i> . The <i>Institutional Listing Report</i> is then forwarded to the next step of the process.
Deferred for Condition Fulfilment	Where any of the five Institutional Listing Standards is <i>Partially Met</i> , and none of the standards is <i>Not Met</i> , the ILEP will opt for <i>Deferred for Condition Fulfilment</i> . The institution will be given a transitional period to submit evidence to fulfil the stated conditions in the <i>Institutional Listing Report</i> to reach to a final judgment on the Institutional Listing Application.
Not Listed	Where any of the five Institutional Listing Standards is <i>Not Met</i> , the ILEP will opt for a judgment of <i>Not Listed</i> , and the institution has to submit a new Institutional Listing Application.

Where overall judgement is either *Deferred for Condition Fulfilment* or *Not Listed*, the institution has to submit condition fulfilment documentation or re-submit a new application, respectively.

3.6.5 Site Visit

The ILEP may conduct a site visit to the institution. The site visit is held at the institution's premises or could be virtual. It provides an opportunity for the ILEP members and the institution's representatives to discuss the submitted *Institutional Listing Application*, respond to any enquiries put forward by the ILEP and provide extra evidence and information. The site visit ends with an oral feedback meeting chaired by an ILEP chairperson and attended by the ILEP members, the DFO representatives and the institution's representatives.

3.6.6 Institutional Listing Report

ILEP evaluations and judgements communicated during the oral feedback meeting, are drafted in the *Institutional Listing Report*. For institutions that are scheduled for joint IL evaluation a *Summary Evaluation Report* would be written based GDR (*DHR or DVR*) *Review Report*. Once the *Institutional Listing Report* is finalised, it is reviewed, quality assured and internally approved. A copy of the draft report will be sent to the institution for a factual accuracy check; this is not an opportunity for the institution to ask for changes to the evaluation and conclusions or submit new evidence. The institution will return the draft report to the DFO with any written comments within five working days. After the DFO has considered the institution's comments and made any appropriate changes, the report is finalised and forwarded for approval and for listing the institution in the NQF Register, as described in the following section. The institution may appeal according to the BQA policies and procedures.

3.6.7 Approval and Registration

An institution attaining *Listed* status progresses through the next stages:

- recommendation of the *Listing* of the institution by the NAC.
- approval of the *Listing* of the institution by the BOD.
- endorsement of the *Listing* of the institution by the Cabinet.

Institutions whose *Listings* are endorsed by the Cabinet are listed in the NQF Register and their profiles are published on the BQA website.

3.7 Condition Fulfilment and Re-submission of Applications

- **Condition Fulfilment:** where the outcome of the ILEP evaluation is *Deferred for Condition Fulfilment*, the institution will be required to fulfil the required conditions within the timeframe⁸ as specified in the *Institutional Listing Report*. Upon submission of the Condition Fulfilment evidence, the ILEP will review the evidence and determine whether the institution has met the *Institutional Listing Standards*. Where the applicant institution is unable to meet the conditions within the specified timeframe, it will be deemed *Not Listed*, and a full *Institutional Listing Application* re-submission will be required as described below.

⁸ The timeframe is set by ILEP based on the number and significance of conditions, not exceeding six months.

- **Application Re-Submission:** where the outcome of the ILEP evaluation is *Not Listed*, the institution is required to re-submit a new *Institutional Listing Application*. This cannot be re-submitted before six months of receiving the final judgment. The re-submitted *Institutional Listing Application* will then be processed as per the DFO plans and schedule of evaluations. An institution is allowed up to two re-submissions for an application which is judged *Not listed*.

3.8 Monitoring of Listed Institutions

Following the listing of the institution in the NQF Register, the institution will maintain its status through the outcomes of quality assurance reviews carried out by the relevant directorates of the GDR. The institutions must continue to pass the quality assurance review and meet all Institutional Listing Standards, which are incorporated as part of the quality assurance review frameworks. Additionally, institutions need to provide the DFO with their renewed institution licence/approval by the relevant regulatory body to maintain the listing status in the NQF Register, where applicable. The DFO will change the status of a *Listed* institution, including changing its placed qualifications to *Archived*, if it is no longer licensed/approved or has not passed its periodic quality assurance review (*refer to NQF General Policy 1*). The DFO is responsible for ensuring the NQF Register remains up-to-date and accurate.

Additionally, each year and as part of the broader quality assurance provision, institutions are required to advise the DFO of any significant changes within the institutions' formal arrangements relating to the institutional listing. Where the reported changes are found to have critically changed the formal arrangements, the DFO reserves the right to require the institution to submit a new *Institutional Listing Application* (*further details are provided in Chapter 7: Monitoring and Review*).



Qualification Design, Level and Credit

4. Qualification Design, Level and Credit

☞ This Chapter considers the design and development of qualifications and emphasizes on the importance and use of learning outcomes and assessment.

4.1 Introduction

Design and development of national qualifications are generally undertaken by education and training institutions. These institutions also have responsibility for maintaining and updating curricula, managing and delivering assessment, and ensuring quality in all matters pertaining to access and admission, teaching, learning, assessment, examination and ultimately the award of certificates to successful learners.

In all fields, sectors and disciplines, the continuing provision of education and training is driven by the labour market, learners, and other needs. When designing or developing (or updating) a qualification, both rationale and justification must be clear and well stated, with external or contributory sources and preparatory consultation actions or events directly cited.

4.2 Qualification Design Requirements

The design of qualifications is a process that involves many different factors and stakeholders. Education and training institutions often establish a *Qualification Design Team* (QDT), bringing together the required educational development, assessment and sector-specific expertise. Industry stakeholders, such as companies and professional bodies are also consulted by institutions in many instances, to provide an important labour market perspective to the qualification design and quality assurance processes. Regulatory or governing bodies also play an important role in the design (or re-design) of qualifications.

As governed by *NQF General Policy 2 (Qualifications Compliance)*, all new, revised or updated qualifications placed on the NQF must adhere to the following NQF *qualification design requirements*:

- comply with relevant regulatory body requirements and criteria, where applicable,
- development of qualifications must be based on justification linked to learners, labour market, or other needs,
- qualifications must be developed in line with any related national standards, where applicable (e.g. National Occupational Standards),

- qualifications should articulate access requirements, mechanisms for credit transfer and RPL progression routes for learners, and whether they would lead to further studies or employment as applicable,
- qualifications must have appropriate structures, expressed in units and stating mandatory and elective units where applicable,
- qualifications and comprising units must state learning outcomes. Learning outcomes must be assessed using summative assessment and comply with the NQF Level and Credit requirements. The institution must ensure that learning outcomes are covered adequately with fit-for-purpose assessments and demonstrate – where applicable – how learning outcomes of individual units are being linked to the overall learning outcomes of the qualification or programme. Learning outcomes may include transferable skills such as communication, numeracy, problem solving, information technology and working with others,
- units have to be linked with learning and teaching methods that are adequate and appropriate for the stated learning outcomes,
- special needs learners are provided with suitable learning and assessment arrangements (*refer to NQF General Policy 5*),
- qualifications and comprising units must be allocated an NQF Level and Credit value,
- qualifications' design must adhere to the NQF Credit Framework Guidelines, where applicable (*see Appendix 1*),
- suitable arrangements are in place for the *Mapping* and *Confirmation* processes. Members participating in the Mapping and Confirmation processes should be able to apply the NQF policies, procedures and guidelines, and must be familiar with the use of *NQF Level Descriptors*. The institution must follow the qualifications *Mapping* and *Confirmation* processes declared within the institutional listing submission.

The NQF recognises all forms of learning, including flexible learning. Learning through *Micro-credentials (MC)* is one of the evolving forms of flexible learning. MC are defined as small units of learning with specific characteristics and purpose; their characteristics include a short duration, assessed, based on learning outcomes, credit-based, and the ability to “stack” these credits to form a part of a larger programme and result in certification or digital badges.

The NQF also recognises Apprenticeship qualifications, which are formal outcome-based learning and training that combine learning that occur in the education or training institution with substantial work-based learning in the workplace.

4.3 NQF Level Descriptors

As explained earlier in this Handbook, the NQF comprises ten levels with each level providing an indication of the intellectual demands made on the learner, the complexity of learning, and the level of autonomy required to demonstrate learning achievement. The NQF *Level Descriptors* (see *Appendix 2*) are used along with other sources of information to determine the level of the qualification, and its comprising units. Other sources, which will become more widely available as qualifications are placed on the NQF, include subject benchmarks, qualifications at the same level, and comparable qualifications on other frameworks. The NQF *Level Descriptors* are generic and equally applicable to academic, vocational and work-based qualifications. A best-fit approach is used to determine the level of qualifications and individual units on the NQF.

Each of the ten levels of the NQF is identified by a unique *level descriptor* comprising three separate strands that cover *Knowledge, Skills and Competence*, as shown in **Table 4**. The strands are further divided into five sub-strands. The strands and sub-strands are detailed in *Appendix 2*.

Table 4. Definitions of Knowledge, Skills and Competence

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	COMPETENCE
The cognitive representation of ideas, events, activities or tasks derived from practical or professional experience as well as from formal instruction or study (e.g. memory, understanding, analysis).	The ability to perform cognitive tasks, or tasks related to communications, ICT and numeracy.	The proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal or social abilities in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

4.4 NQF Credit

NQF credit is based on the notional learning hours required for a typical learner⁹, at a specified level, to achieve a set of learning outcomes. Individual units of a qualification should be allocated notional learning hours, taking into account all

⁹ Typical learners are neither those who can complete the learning outcomes quickly nor those that require additional time.

types of learning activities that contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes.

Credit value can be useful for comparing the depth or volume of learning, aiding the design of units and qualifications, providing a framework for learning access, transfer and progression, and supporting the development of consistent learner workloads across qualifications within different disciplines and/or within different learning environments. For instance, if a comparison is made between two qualifications both at NQF level 7 (one with 120 credits and the other with 60 credits) the level shows that both qualifications have an equal level of difficulty, but the one with fewer NQF credits is shown to have significantly less learning time. Alternatively, two qualifications having the same number of credits (one at NQF Level 6, the other at NQF Level 7) shows that both qualifications will take the same number of notional hours to complete, but the qualification at NQF Level 6 is less demanding than the one at NQF Level 7.

The NQF considers a standard academic year to involve 1,200 notional learning hours, or 120 NQF Credits, a ratio of 10:1. The NQF does not allow the use of fractions in the calculated credits; fraction credit hours are rounded to the nearest whole credit. Other credit systems may already be in use in the Kingdom of Bahrain (notable examples including the American Credit System (ACS) and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)), and with a view to ensuring consistency and transparency a number of conversion mechanisms¹⁰ have already been agreed on for use with the NQF. **Table 5** describes the approximate conversion mechanisms.

Table 5. Approximate Conversion Mechanism to Convert ACS and ECTS to NQF Credit

American Credit System (ACS)	European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)
To convert AC to NQF credit multiply the number of AC credit hours by 4.	To convert ECTS to NQF credit multiply the number of ECTS credits by 2.

4.5 Learning Outcomes

Learning or performance outcomes sit at the heart of all qualification design activity. Learning outcomes provide many advantages, and from a quality assurance perspective, they increase transparency and comparability within and

¹⁰ The provided conversion rules are general guidelines to facilitate credit conversion. However, the institution may not follow these rules to calculate the NQF Credit for some units, with provision of proper justification (i.e. having laboratory or studio hours that need to be added to the notional hours or adding more independent learning hours for preparing Master or PhD thesis).

between qualifications and act as reference points for assessment. Learning outcomes also assist teachers, trainers and other educators in selecting the most appropriate method of learning delivery for a particular unit or qualification, and in selecting the most appropriate method for assessing the achievement of learners.

For learners and potential future employers, learning outcomes provide information on the knowledge, skills and competence that will be achieved on successful completion of the unit or qualification. Learning outcomes help learners to study more effectively, as they guide learners on their learning journey by explaining what is expected of them and the anticipated level of learning.

Learning outcomes are also an excellent guidance tool, helping with the selection of programmes, and providing clear information on the content of units and qualifications and what can be pursued upon achieving the learning outcomes. Learner and professional mobility are also more easily achieved through the use of learning outcomes, facilitating the recognition of units and qualifications and making credit transfer easier.

When writing learning outcomes, with a view to ensuring that learning outcomes are written at the required (or desired) level, it is important to:

- become familiar with the NQF *Level Descriptors* at the level for which the unit is being written, in addition to those above and below, and to regularly revisit these during the writing process.
- identify the distinguishing features between NQF levels, such as problem-solving skills, familiarity, supervised or independent working, and routine or non-routine actions.
- learning outcomes should be indicative of the NQF level, however, *Level Descriptors* should not be used as learning outcomes.
- show what is expected to be achieved by learners in terms of knowledge, skills and/or competence.
- ensure that the learning outcomes are measurable and achievable.
- ensure that there is a clear linkage between the learning outcomes and the assessment methods.
- ensure that there is a clear linkage between the unit's learning outcomes and the programme/qualification's learning outcomes.
- use a manageable number of learning outcomes.

It is often helpful to start a learning outcome with an appropriate active verb, followed by a noun or action that learners are required to achieve, and finally adding additional criteria to indicate how or when the outcome will be measured to add context for the learners. The used active verbs should be measurable and

reflect the level of learning required to be achieved by learners. In all cases, learning outcomes must be specific, achievable and assessable and should:

- be written in the future tense.
- use active verbs to describe what the learner will be able to do.
- describe the final achievement for the learner.
- enable the learner to show their learning.
- use clear language, easily understood by learners and wider stakeholders (non-experts).
- be achievable as a result of the learning activity.
- be focused and comprises one desired result/action to be achieved by the learner.
- be assessable.

4.6 Assessment

Assessment tasks and activities must be designed to ensure that individual learners have the opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of different learning outcomes. One way of ensuring this is to directly link assessment to learning outcomes, making the purpose of assessment clear and transparent to individual learners.

Assessment involves gathering, evaluating, analysing and judging evidence in order to decide whether a learner has achieved the predefined learning outcomes. It relies on a broad range of formative and summative assessment tools and processes as described in **Table 6**, the former providing an insight into learners' progress, while the latter is rather more formal and provides evidence for future credit and awards.

Table 6. Overview of Formative and Summative Assessment

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
Formative assessment is essential for effective learning, teaching and training and provides an opportunity for both learners and their teachers or trainers to review progress towards the achievement of learning outcomes. Formative assessment activities act as a guide to progress rather than providing any formal credit.	Summative assessment provides evidence of learning achievement for learners, employers and educational institutions. Assessment tasks and activities are undertaken both during delivery (e.g. observation of practical activities) and on completion of a unit or programme of learning (e.g. written test) and provide evidence for credits and awards.

Assessment often relies on the use of a number of tools and instruments. Assessment tools and instruments can include, but are not limited to:

- case studies.
- written examinations.
- observed practical exercises.
- observed performance at work.
- role-play and/or other targeted group activities.
- oral, aural and visual processes and presentations.
- long-answer questions (reports, proposals for action, specialist articles).
- short answer questions and structured questions.
- selected-response items (e.g. multiple-choice).

Assessment processes should be both fit-for-purpose, rigorous and fair, and should be aligned with the level and type of learning provided by the qualification or unit. With assessment practices managed and delivered across a broad range of education and training institutions, it is important to ensure that quality assurance mechanisms are in place with a view to ensuring that assessment is efficiently, effectively and consistently delivered, and that internal and external assessment moderation and verification processes exist.

As described in *NQF General Policy 5*, the DFO is committed to encouraging access to qualifications by learners with special needs through ensuring that all qualifications enable access to all learners and that, where required, reasonable adjustments are made in delivery and assessment processes to support learners with special needs. The NQF has two entry levels which should assist all learners, including those with special needs to gain access to mainstream education and training.



Qualifications Placement

5. Qualifications Placement

☞ This Chapter describes the process of placing national qualifications on the NQF, eligibility conditions alongside composite steps and different stakeholders involved in placement activity.

5.1 Introduction

The placement of national qualifications on the NQF provides a means of determining their value. Through this process, education and training institutions and stakeholders, including learners, employers and parents can expect to have a better understanding of the wide variety of qualifications. Stakeholders can be assured that any qualification placed on the NQF is fit-for-purpose and meets the needs of learners or the labour market (*refer to NQF General Policy 3*).

5.2 Eligibility of Qualifications

To be eligible for placement on the NQF, in addition to being submitted by a listed institution, qualifications have to meet the following requirements (*refer to NQF General Policy 2*):

- have a valid licence/approval issued by the appropriate regulatory body¹¹ (e.g. Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, Higher Education Council, etc.).
- be developed and delivered in the Kingdom of Bahrain.
- be internally quality assured within the institution.
- comprise at least ten notional learning hours.
- meet the NQF *qualification design requirements* (*see Chapter 4*).

5.3 Annual Planning & Scheduling

Prior to submitting the *Qualification Placement Application Form*, and on an annual basis, institutions must fill in the NQF Annual Planning Survey with the details of their applications to be considered as part of the DFO processing schedule. Survey forms received would be considered based on the DFO processing capacity for the upcoming academic year. Qualifications will only be considered eligible for scheduling as per the Qualification Placement eligibility criteria (*see Section 5.2*). It is highly recommended to include the qualifications that have the same

¹¹ Institutions established by other legal instruments (e.g. Decree, Resolution, etc.) have to submit documentation demonstrating internal approval of qualifications.

specialisation together with the same processing period. In the case of Higher Education, qualifications from the same college are recommended to be included within the same processing period. Where applicable, placement could also be conducted jointly with the GDR review.

High-performing institutions are invited and granted self-validation status by the BQA. The self-validation status gives the institution the right to carry out the qualifications validation process internally prior to placing them on the NQF.

5.4 Capacity Building

The DFO supports education and training institutions through capacity building, prior to submitting their *Qualification Placement Applications*.

5.5 Qualification Placement Process

The placement of national qualifications on the NQF involves the education and training institutions and the DFO. It is worth noting that institutions are responsible for ensuring that *Mapping* and *Confirmation* processes and activities are implemented as stated in the *Institutional Listing Application* submitted by the institution. The qualification placement process is illustrated in **Figure 5**, while **Table 7** shows the estimated processing times required for the various steps in the process.

Table 7. Processing Times for Qualification Placement Applications

	Step	Duration (number of working days)
1	Acknowledgement	Two
2	Qualification Placement Application Processing	40
3	Validation Event (if required)	One
4	Validation Report finalisation by the Panel, internal quality assurance and factual accuracy	15

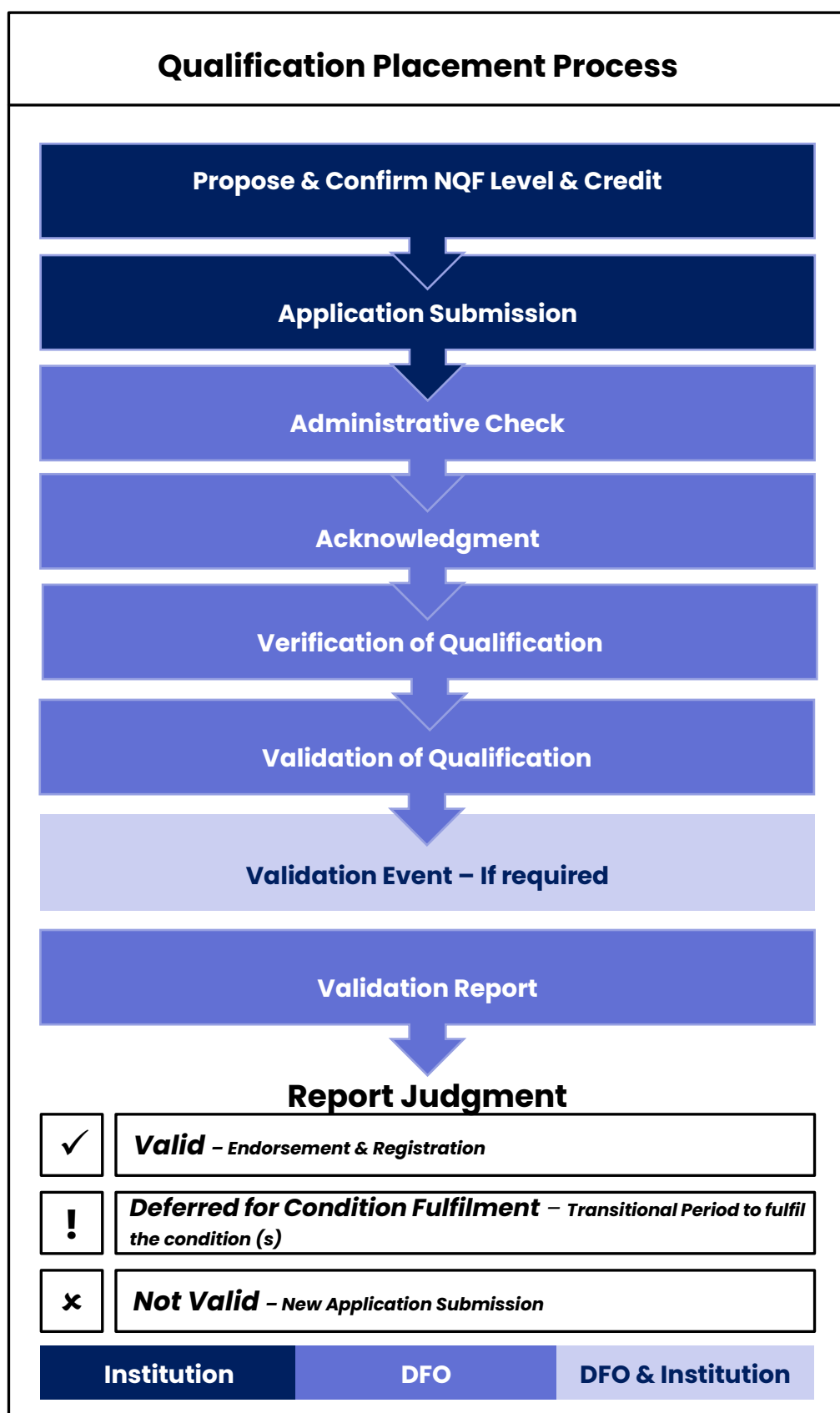


Figure 6. Illustration of Qualification Placement Process

5.5.1 Proposing and Confirming NQF Level and Credit Value

The placement of national qualifications on the NQF generally begins at the institution with the proposal and internal endorsement of the NQF Level and Credit value respectively in the *Mapping* and *Confirmation* processes.

5.5.1.1 Proposing NQF Level and Credit Value

The *Mapping* process involves the proposal of an NQF Level and Credit value for each unit of a qualification as well as for the qualification as a whole. It is important to remember that mapping qualifications is a matter of professional judgement and that institutions should ensure that the viewpoint of more than one professional is taken into account where applicable. To achieve this, institutions are required to establish a *Mapping Panel* (refer to *NQF General Policy 2*). Members of the *Mapping Panel* must be unbiased, capable of acting objectively, and must be prepared to agree and document their final decisions along with the rationale or reasons behind these. Ideally the *Mapping Panel* should consist of members with relevant expertise including:

- one or more core discipline(s) addressed by the qualification.
- related sector occupations.
- mapping of qualifications.
- lecturing or training in the targeted subject or disciplines.
- assessment design.

Proposing the NQF Level

The role of the *Mapping Panel* is to establish and propose the NQF level of a particular qualification and its comprising units by comparing learning outcomes and the associated assessment for each unit to the *NQF Level Descriptors*. The *Mapping Panel* is also responsible for proposing the number of NQF credits for individual units, based on the number of notional learning hours required to achieve defined learning outcomes.

The *Mapping Panel* must consider the level of each of the units that comprise a qualification, as these will determine the overall NQF Level of the qualification. The *mapping scorecard* is used to document the NQF Level for each unit. The unit intended learning outcomes should be mapped to the sub-stands of the *NQF Level Descriptor*. Institutions should avoid over-mapping the learning outcomes to the sub-stands, learning outcomes should be mapped to the most appropriate sub-stand. An NQF Level is assigned based on best-fit and according to the relevant learning outcomes and assessment stated, and other factors such as:

- complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding,
- degree of independence and creativity,
- range of sophistication in application and practice,
- role taken in relation to others in carrying out tasks.

The level of the unit is determined based on the levels assigned to each sub-strand. The rationales justifying the NQF Level for each unit and qualification must be clearly and properly documented in the *mapping scorecard* to provide sufficient information that allows subsequent verification by the DFO. When writing the rationale for an NQF Level, it is required that the rationale statement includes the justification for the unit to meet the NQF *Level Descriptors*. The written rationale should maintain good linkage to the relevant learning outcomes, and assessment and should include keywords for descriptors of the proposed NQF Level. The information provided as part of the *mapping scorecards* should be consistent with the information stated in the unit's document (course specification/ course outline/ course syllabus). The unit document should be recent and include all the information needed to verify the proposed NQF Level and Credit, including the list of approved learning outcomes, assessment methods, the mapping between the learning outcomes and assessment.

Once the *Mapping Panel* has agreed on the levels of all units of a qualification, they should then determine the overall NQF level of the qualification, for which a number of common models or approaches exist such as using:

- **equal components:** a simple model that is used when all units of the qualification are at the same level.
- **exit level:** often adopted for larger qualifications lasting one year or more, or for qualifications that have been designed at a particular level. Such qualifications are usually governed by a distinct specification, relevant to the type of qualification, in which the minimum number of credits is predefined for the levels of the qualification. In such, learners build up their knowledge as they progress through the qualification, with the exit level determining the eventual NQF level.
- **proportional design:** a model which determines the level of the overall qualification based on the proportion of units at a particular level – for example a qualification comprising six units in total, two of which are at NQF Level 6 and four of which are at NQF Level 7, would opt for NQF Level 7 since the majority of units are at that level.

Where none of the above models is applicable (e.g. for a smaller qualification with an equal number of units at different levels), the *Mapping Panel* will need to decide on the eventual (proposed) level of the qualification taking into account:

- the credit value of each unit.

- the target groups the qualification is aimed at.
- the level of any prerequisite requirements.
- the importance (weighting) of individual units within the qualification.
- the level(s) of entry or progression pathways.

In all cases, the *Mapping Panel* should formally document the basis on which they make their final decision on the overall level of a qualification.

Proposing the NQF Credit Value

The NQF definition of notional learning hours is the time in hours that an average learner would take to successfully complete all learning activities, including assessments, required for achieving the learning outcomes and subsequently a qualification. The number of notional learning hours required by a typical learner should be calculated by those with experience in the subject area and should take into account only those activities that relate directly to the learning outcomes of the unit or qualification in question (i.e. not taking into account any prerequisite knowledge that the learner requires prior to starting the unit or qualification). Institutions should consider activities that need to be carried out by the learner before and after formal teaching or training sessions – for example, before delivery there may be a need for preparatory reading or use of the library (or Internet) for carrying out research. After delivery time may be required for revision and assessment. Examples of activities that may be considered in the calculation (or estimate) of notional learning hours, include:

- formal teaching sessions (lectures, classes, coaching, seminars, tutorials).
- practical work (in laboratories and other locations).
- relevant ICT activities.
- use of the library or learning resource centres for reading and research.
- self-directed study time.
- reflection.
- assessment.

Institutions should ensure that all learning activities and assessment mentioned in the unit document (course specification/ course outline/ course syllabus) are assigned with adequate notional hours in the *mapping scorecard*. Once the number of notional learning hours is calculated it is easy to calculate the number of NQF credits by dividing the number of notional learning hours by ten and rounding the result to the nearest whole credit. Any placed qualification on the NQF has to be of at least 10 notional hours, and as a result, the minimum number of NQF credits that can be awarded is one. The distribution of NQF Credit among the NQF Level should comply with the *NQF Credit Framework Guidelines*. The information provided as part of the *mapping scorecards* should be consistent with the information stated in the unit's document (course specification/ course outline/

course syllabus). The unit document should be recent and include all the information needed to verify the proposed NQF Level and Credit, including all learning activities and assessment methods.

Confirming NQF Level and Credit Value

Once the *Mapping Panel* has come to an agreement on the proposed NQF Level and Credit value, the next step is for the institution to confirm these proposals by bringing together a *Confirmation Panel* comprising members that are independent of the original *Mapping Panel*. The *Confirmation Panel* comprises individuals with relevant expertise and experience covering the targeted discipline or sector. Larger institutions might decide that an existing internal organisational arrangement, the internal quality assurance department or an existing academic committee, is best suited to undertake this confirmation activity. Smaller institutions might not have such arrangements or committees in place and might choose instead to introduce *Confirmation Panels* suitable for their operations. Whichever mechanism an institution puts in place for confirmation activity, it is important that the results of this process are communicated formally, both internally within the institution and to the DFO. The *Confirmation Panel* should confirm the proposed NQF Level and Credit, through ensuring appropriate mapping between the learning outcomes and the sub-strand, appropriate rationale is provided for each sub-strand, appropriate assessment is used, and appropriate notional hours is assigned to each learning activity. The *Confirmation Panel* should also ensure that the *mapping scorecards* are final and free of error/s.

Where the *Confirmation Panel* disagrees with the proposed NQF Level and Credit values, clarification (or re-submission of scorecards) should be sought from the *Mapping Panel* and through internal discussion that aims to eventually reach agreement on the NQF Level and Credit value of the units and the overall qualification. Once a consensus has been achieved between the *Mapping Panel* and the *Confirmation Panel*, the confirmed NQF Level and Credit value for each unit and the overall qualification are documented in the *mapping scorecard* and the *Qualification Placement Application Form*.

5.5.2 Preparing and Submitting a Qualification Placement Application

Having mapped and confirmed the NQF Level and Credit value of a particular qualification, institutions are then able to launch the application process. Before submitting the *Qualification Placement Application Form*, institutions must complete the service charge payment, following *BQA Service Charge Guidelines*. The Institution should review the whole application and ensure that it is free of error/s and include proper evidence indexing before submitting it to the DFO along with the supporting material in an electronic format.

5.5.3 Administrative Check

Once a *Qualification Placement Application* is received by the DFO will check the application, considering the following:

- the institution's listing status (i.e. that it has been officially, and still is, *Listed* in the NQF Register),
- the eligibility of the qualification for placement on the NQF (including the required approval from the relevant regulatory body),
- the completeness and clarity of the application and any associated documentation.

Where key documents are found to be missing or incomplete, the institution will be contacted and asked to supply the required information or evidence within an agreed deadline. Where the quality of the application is not up to the expected standard¹², or the institution is not co-operating with the DFO in submitting the required information or evidence within the agreed deadlines, the DFO reserves the right not to acknowledge the application receipt.

5.5.4 Acknowledgement

Upon receiving the *administrative check* response, the DFO will send an acknowledgment receipt to the institution within two working days. The purpose of this acknowledgement is to advise the institution of the receipt date of the *Qualification Placement Application* and provide the contact details of the *Application Manager* assigned to the application.

5.5.5 Verification of Qualifications

Once the application is *acknowledged*, the DFO will check compliance against NQF *qualification design requirements* (see Chapter 4) and will verify the qualification to ensure that the NQF Level and Credit value have been determined by due process (refer to NQF General Policy 3). At this stage, the following steps will be undertaken:

- review of the rationale behind the institution's decision on the NQF Level and Credit value for each unit and for the qualification as a whole.
- check that the NQF Level and Credit value are in line with NQF *Level Descriptors* for each unit and for the qualification as a whole.

¹² These include applications with improper evidence indexing, irrelevant supporting materials, inconsistencies in information across submitted materials and applications that still miss major requirements after submitting the administrative check requirements.

- ensure that Credit requirements and the qualification title are in line with the of the *NQF Credit Framework Guidelines*.
- ensure consistency among the submitted documents, namely the *units' documents* and the *mapping scorecards*.
- ensure that the design and type of qualification complies with any relevant regulatory body requirements and criteria where applicable.

In cases where there is unclear or missing evidence or documentation during the verification process, the institution will be contacted to provide any additional requirements that must be met prior to progressing to the next step. Otherwise, a verification report will be completed along with a proposed list of *Validators*, and the qualification will proceed to the next step.

5.5.6 Validation of Qualifications

Validation is the process by which DFO ensures that national qualifications are credible, fit-for-purpose, and meet market and learner needs. Validation involves a process of expert reviews that focus on the justification for and coherence of a qualification (*refer to NQF General Policy 4*).

While all qualifications submitted for placement on the NQF are subject to validation, the procedure to be followed varies according to the size of the associated qualification, with either a single *Validator* undertaking this task (generally a subject expert) or a panel of *Validators*. **Table 8** shows when a single *Validator* is used as opposed to a *Validation Panel*.

Table 8. Use of a Single Validator versus a Validation Panel

SINGLE VALIDATOR	VALIDATION PANEL
Qualifications (or units of qualifications) valued at four credits or less, or consisting of a single unit, will undergo validation by a single <i>Validator</i> – normally a subject expert.	Qualifications (or units of qualifications) valued at five or more credits, and consisting of more than a single unit, will undergo validation by a <i>Validation Panel</i> .

A *Validation Panel* comprises educationalists/trainers and business/industry professionals. Educationalists/trainers are academics, educators, teachers and/or trainers with experience in the relevant qualification sector and who have qualifications of equal or above the level of the qualification being validated. Business/industry professionals are employers or professionals with knowledge and experience in the sector.

Validators are appointed and approved as per BQA guidelines. To meet the need for *Validators* the BQA has established a database of approved *Validators* covering a range of fields, disciplines and specialisations. All *Validators* are trained by the DFO on NQF-related policies and procedures and the use of *Validation Standards*.

5.5.6.1 Validation Standards

Applicant institutions are required to provide evidence substantiating their compliance with the *Validation Standards*. These *Standards* are designed to ensure that national qualifications offered in the Kingdom of Bahrain are fit-for-purpose and meet NQF and regulatory bodies' requirements. There are five *Validation Standard*; each comprises a set of indicators as follows:

Standard 1: Justification of Need

- **Indicator 1.1. Actual and Tangible Need.** The institution should provide actual and tangible labour market, learners, societal or legal needs based on trusted and recent data source. (*i.e. national, regional and international studies, reports, and databases that support the need for this qualification*)
- **Indicator 1.2. Stakeholders Feedback.** The institution's mechanism/s for continuously identifying and maintaining the qualification rationale based on the stakeholders' feedback (*i.e. Training Need Analysis, surveys, meetings, focus groups, interviews, consulting sessions, advisory committees*), and how this feedback is analysed and utilised to improve the qualification (*i.e. analysis reports, action plan and minutes of meetings*).
- **Indicator 1.3. Career Progression and Learning Pathways.** The institutions should provide details of qualification career progression, potential occupation and educational pathways with tracking of the qualification's graduates per cohort, with particular emphasis on the employability rates, job type, employability timing and/or skills enhancements. Information about any career counselling provided to learners to support their progression. (*i.e. graduate destination list and alumni surveys*). Career progression and educational pathways should be communicated to learners (*i.e. could be documented in the programme specification, catalogue or the institution's website*).

Standard 2: Qualification Compliance

- **Indicator 2.1 Qualification Licence and Approval.** The institutions should provide details of qualification licence as per the regulatory body requirements and its internal approval as per the institution's internal

mechanisms. The licence should be recent and valid (*i.e. qualification licence, qualification internal approval document and qualification certificate*).

- **Indicator 2.2. Qualification Access and Transfer.** The institutions should provide details of qualification access (admission requirements), credit transfer (internal and external), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and appeal for access and credit transfer. These mechanisms should be specified clearly, documented and adhere to any national standard/requirement for the qualification. (*i.e. qualification admission criteria, samples of admission tests, samples of admission form, samples of credit transfer from and to the programme, samples of recognition of prior learning request, and samples of appeal against admission and transfer*). Qualification admission criteria should be communicated to learners (*i.e. could be documented in the programme specification, catalogue or the institution's website*).
- **Indicator 2.3. Qualification Graduation Requirements.** The institutions should provide the qualification's graduation requirements and the criteria to acquire qualifications. These requirements and criteria should be specified clearly, documented and adhere to any national standard/requirement for the qualification (*i.e. qualification graduation criteria or forms used to ensure fulfilment of the graduation requirements*). Qualification graduation requirements should be communicated to learners (*i.e. could be documented in the programme specification, catalogue or the institution's website*).
- **Indicator 2.4. Qualification Alignment and Benchmarking.** The institutions should provide qualification alignment/benchmark with any related national, regional or international standards or qualifications, with their attributes (*i.e. learning outcomes, unit content and assessment*), outcomes, recommendations and action plans (*i.e. benchmarking report, benchmarking recommendations, benchmarking action plan, benchmarking minutes of meetings*). Details of how the qualification's design supports the Sustainable Development Goals, where applicable.
- **Indicator 2.5. Qualification Internal and External Evaluation and Review.** The institutions should provide details of internal post-delivery evaluation of the qualification and its comprising units, and recent internal and external programme review/s with their results, recommendations and action plans (*i.e. samples of internal and external programme reports, recommendations, action plan, minutes of meetings*).

- **Indicator 2.6. Mapping and Confirmation Processes.** The institutions should provide details of Mapping and Confirmation processes, including Panels' establishment and minutes of meetings (*i.e. mapping and conformation term of reference, mapping and confirmation panels establishment decisions, mapping and confirmation panels minutes of meetings, mapping or confirmation reports*).
- **Indicator 2.7. Programme Accreditation.** The institutions should provide the programme accreditation by an external agency, where applicable (*i.e. accreditation certificate, accreditation report, accreditation agreement, accreditation plan*).

Standard 3: Qualification Design, Content and Structure

- **Indicator 3.1. Qualification Title.** The institutions should ensure that the title of the qualification is concise and indicative of its content, complies with the *Credit Framework* requirements and accurately documented on the certificates, programme description documents and institution's website (*i.e. qualification licence/approval, Qualification certificate, programme description, programme specification, programme study plan, catalogue and website link*).
- **Indicator 3.2. Learning Outcomes (LOs).** The institutions should ensure that the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) and Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) appropriately articulate the desired complexity of the qualification and its comprising units, and a clear mapping between CILOs and PILOs must exist. Learning outcomes should be consistently documented in all the qualifications documents (*i.e. programme description, programme specification, programme study plan, catalogue and website link, PILOs-CILOs mapping*).
- **Indicator 3.3. Qualification Attendance and Delivery Modes.** The institutions should provide details of the qualification attendance mode (full time or part-time) and the programme delivery mode (on-campus, online or blended). Programme attendance and delivery modes should be communicated to learners (*i.e. could be documented in the programme description, programme specification, programme study plan, catalogue and website*).
- **Indicator 3.4. Qualification Structure and Duration.** The institutions should provide details of the programme structure, as in the programme specification/ curriculum plan, including the breakdown of the

mandatory/elective units, introductory/specialised units, the programme duration number of units, notional length and whether it is appropriate for the intended learning outcomes (*i.e. programme description, programme specification, programme study plan, catalogue and website link*).

- **Indicator 3.5. Qualification Content.** The institutions should ensure the appropriateness and recency of the topics, materials and content delivered as part of the qualification and its comprising units, and whether it is appropriate for the intended learning outcomes **with particular emphasis on the Industrial Training/ Internship and senior/ graduation project units, where applicable** (*i.e. programme description, programme specification, programme study plan, catalogue, website link and units' specifications*).
- **Indicator 3.6. Progression and Flow.** The institutions should provide details of the progression/flow of units and their pre-requisites over the programme duration. Information about academic advising provided to learners to ensure a smooth progression of knowledge and skills throughout the programme (*i.e. units progression tree, units progression plan programme description, programme specification, programme study plan, catalogue, website link and units specifications*).
- **Indicator 3.7. Unit/s Information.** The institutions should ensure that each unit should have an official document (syllabus/ outline/ specification) that clearly describes the unit's title, pre-requisite (if available), learning outcomes, content, assessment breakdown and weight, mapping of assessment to learning outcomes and credit value. This document should be communicated to learners (*i.e. all unit specifications, syllabi or outlines*).
- **Indicator 3.8. Learning Resources and Learner Support.** The institutions should provide its arrangements to ensure that appropriate and adequate levels of learning resources, Information Communication and Technology (ICT) resources, and physical infrastructure are provided and maintained to support learners' achievement of learning outcomes within the specified programme attendance mode and the programme delivery mode. A clear plan for learner support should exist, especially in case of online and blended learning (*i.e. resources checklist, resources log, ICT specifications, book and reference logs, physical infrastructure logs and technical support*).
- **Indicator 3.9. Learners with Special Needs.** The institutions should provide arrangements used to ensure suitable adjustments are provided to learners with special needs admitted to the programme, where applicable. (*i.e.*

learners requests, special needs reports or minutes of meetings, institution decision).

Standard 4: Assessment Design and Moderation

- **Indicator 4.1. Assessment Design.** The institutions should provide details on how the assessments are designed to adequately cover the learning outcomes, to match their level of complexity, and following the guidelines stated in the institution's assessment policy. A clear mapping between the learning outcomes and assessment must exist. Assessment design should be appropriate for the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. samples of assessment at different units' level, assessment cover page showing the mapping between the ILOs, and units specifications/ syllabi or outlines showing the mapping between ILOs and assessment*).
- **Indicator 4.2. Internal and External Verification and Moderation of Assessment.** The institutions should provide details on how the internal and external verification of assessment design is implemented consistently and as agreed in the institution assessment policy (*i.e. samples of internal and external verification forms or reports for units at different levels and list of external verifiers*). Details of how the internal and external moderation of assessment result is implemented consistently and as agreed in the institution assessment policy (*i.e. samples of internal and external moderation forms or reports for units at different levels and list of external moderators*).
- **Indicator 4.3. Marking Criteria.** The institutions should provide details on how the assessment is marked based on pre-set and published marking criteria, rubrics, marking schemes or answers keys (*i.e. samples of marking criteria, rubrics, marking schemes and answer keys*).
- **Indicator 4.4. Measuring the Achievement of Learning Outcomes.** The institutions should provide the mechanism used to assess the learners' achievement and ensure the achievement of the PILOs and CILOs, the threshold/rubric for considering the ILOs as achieved and ensure taking improvement actions when not achieved, taking into account the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. ILOs measurement matrices, ILOs measurement reports, action plan based on ILOs measurement*).
- **Indicator 4.5. Feedback to Learners.** The institutions should ensure constructive feedback on assessment is provided to learners in a timely

manner and as agreed in the institution's assessment policy, taking into account the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. samples of marked assessment for units at different levels, feedback forms*).

- **Indicator 4.6. Appeal Against Assessment Result.** The institutions should ensure that the appeal against result process is implemented consistently and as agreed in the institution assessment policy. Learners should be aware of their right to appeal against result. (*i.e. samples of appeal against result forms*).
- **Indicator 4.7. The Integrity of Assessment.** The institutions should provide the mechanism used to ensure the integrity of the assessment, including identification, reporting and resolving cases of plagiarism and other academic misconducts, especially where the programme is delivered online or blended. (*i.e. plagiarism reports and samples of academic misconducts cases*).

Standard 5: NQF Level and Credit

- **Indicator 5.1. NQF Level.** The institutions should provide details about the proposed NQF Level for the programme and its comprising units. The Progression of learning complexity (NQF Levels) across the programme structure should be appropriate, and the proposed level should be well justified and adequate to the intended learning outcomes (*i.e. unit specifications/syllabi, mapping scorecards and programme structure section submitted as part of the application form*).
- **Indicator 5.2. NQF Credit.** The institutions should provide details about the proposed NQF Credit for the programme and its comprising units. Ensure that the NQF Credit values calculated accurately and are adequate to the proposed learning outcomes and the programme attendance and delivery modes (*i.e. unit specifications/syllabi, mapping scorecards and programme structure section submitted as part of the application form*).
- **Indicator 5.3. Credit Framework Requirements.** The institutions should ensure that the allocation of NQF Level and Credit complies with the *Credit Framework* requirement (*i.e. unit specifications/syllabi, mapping scorecards and programme structure section submitted as part of the application form*).

For each of the *Validation Standards*, the *Validator or Validation Panel* will choose one of the following three judgements: *Met, Partially Met* or *Not Met*, as described in **Table 9**.

Table 9. Validation Standards Judgement

JUDGEMENT		
MET	PARTIALLY MET	NOT MET
The <i>Validation Standard</i> is sufficiently addressed (No condition/s in all indicators) by the qualification, as evidenced by the submitted evidence and documentation.	<p>The <i>Validation Standard</i> is partially addressed by the qualification, as evidenced by the submitted evidence and documentation.</p> <p>The <i>Validation Panel</i> will require the applicant institution to fulfil all stated conditions within a specified timeframe.</p>	<p>The <i>Validation Standard</i> is not addressed (two thirds or more of the indicators have conditions) by the qualification, as evidenced by the submitted evidence and documentation.</p> <p>The <i>Validation Panel</i> will indicate those aspects that need to be developed or revised to meet the <i>Validation Standard</i>.</p>

Once each standard receives a judgement, the *Validator/Validation panel* has to reach an overall judgement on the submitted *Qualification Placement Application* as described in **Table 10**.

Table 10. Overall Validation Judgement

Valid	For a qualification to be <i>Valid</i> , all five validation standards must be <i>Met</i> . The <i>Validation Report</i> is forwarded to the next step of the qualification placement process.
Deferred for Condition Fulfilment	Where any of the five validation standards is <i>Partially Met</i> , and none of the standards is <i>Not Met</i> , the <i>Validator/Validation Panel</i> will opt for <i>Deferred for Condition Fulfilment</i> . The institution will be given a transitional period to submit evidence to fulfil the stated conditions in the <i>Validation Report</i> to enable the <i>Validator/Validation Panel</i> to reach a final judgment on the
Not Valid	Where any of the five <i>Validation Standards</i> is <i>Not Met</i> , the <i>Validator/Validation Panel</i> will opt for a judgment of <i>Not Valid</i> and the institution has to submit a new <i>Qualification Placement Application</i> .

The *Validator/Validation Panel* will also assign a *validity period* to qualifications, after which the qualification will be subject to re-validation (refer to NQF General Policy 4). Where overall judgement is either *Deferred for Condition Fulfilment* or *Not*

Valid, the institution must submit condition-fulfilment documentation or re-submit a new application, respectively (See Section 5.3.8 Re-Submission of Applications).

5.5.6.2 Validation Process Key Steps and Outcomes

Validation involves a number of key steps, namely:

- appointment of a *Validator* or a *Validation Panel*, with profiles sent to the applicant institution to ensure that there is no conflict of interest with the appointed members.
- signing of a declaration on confidentiality and non-conflict of interest by all *Validators*.
- circulation of materials required for validating the qualification to all *Validators*. Upon receiving the material, the *validators* are responsible for maintaining the security and confidentiality of the received material.
- a *Validation Report* will be prepared in which the final validation outcome is presented.
- agreement is reached with the institution on a date for the *Validation Event*, if required¹³.

5.5.7 Validation Event

A list of the extra evidence required by the *Validator/ Validation Panel* should be communicated to the institution before the date of the *Validation Event*. The institution should provide the required evidence. The validation event is held *-if required-* at the institution's premises or could be virtual, with the qualification's representative(s) invited to present an overview of the proposed qualification to respond to any enquiries put forward by members of the *Validation Panel*, and to check any extra evidence. The event ends with an oral feedback meeting chaired by a *Validation Panel* chairperson and attended by *Validation Panel* members, the DFO representatives and the institution's representatives. The *Validation Panel's* evaluations delivered during the oral feedback meeting are drafted in the *Validation Report*.

¹³ For vocational qualifications that share the same discipline and have common evidence, the Validation Event (site visit) is mandatory for the first batch of qualifications but might be optional for the next batches, based on the Validation Panel recommendations. Validation event can be conducted virtually according to the Validator/ Validation Panel recommendations.

5.5.8 Validation Report

The *Validation Report* will be finalised by the *Validation Panel* chairperson and agreed upon by the Panel. The *Report* is reviewed, quality assured and approved. A copy of the draft *Report* is sent to the institution for a factual accuracy check. The institution must return the draft *Report* to the DFO with any written comments within five working days. After the DFO has considered the institution's comments and made any appropriate changes, the *Report* is finalised and forwarded for approval and for placing the qualification on the NQF – as described in the following section. The institution may appeal according to the BQA policies and procedures.

5.5.9 Approval and Registration

Qualifications attaining Valid status are forwarded to the next stages:

- recommendation of placement of the qualification by the NAC.
- approval of placement of the qualification by the BOD.
- endorsement of placement of the qualification by the Cabinet.

Qualifications endorsed by the Cabinet are placed on the NQF and their profiles published on the BQA website.

5.6 Condition Fulfilment and Re-submission of Applications

- **Condition Fulfilment:** where the outcome of the *Validation Panel* is *Deferred for Condition Fulfilment*, the institution will be required to fulfil the required conditions within the timeframe¹⁴ as specified in the *Validation Report*. Upon submission of the Condition Fulfilment documentation the *Validator/Validation Panel* will review the evidence and determine whether the qualification has met the *Validation Standards*. Where the institution is unable to meet the conditions within the specified timeframe it will be deemed Not Valid, and a full *Qualification Placement Application* re-submission will be required as described below.
- **Application Re-submission:** where the outcome of the validation process is *Not Valid*, the institution is required to submit a new *Qualification Placement Application*. This cannot be resubmitted before six months of receiving the final judgement. The new re-submitted *Qualification Placement Application* will then be processed as per the DFO plans and schedule of evaluations.

¹⁴ The timeframe is set by the Validator/Validation Panel based on the number and significance of conditions, not exceeding six months.

5.7 Monitoring and Re-validation

Following placement on the NQF, qualifications are subject to periodic quality assurance reviews carried out by the GDR and re-validation by the DFO to confirm that they continue to meet the minimum requirements for validated qualifications. The initial validation period generally does not exceed five years. Additionally, institutions need to provide the DFO with their renewed qualification approval by the relevant regulatory body to maintain the placement of their qualifications on the NQF, where applicable.

During the validity period, the DFO will monitor qualifications placed on the NQF. Institutions are also expected to communicate changes within their qualifications or composite units directly to the DFO. Depending on the significance of the reported changes, the DFO may decide to review the validity of a qualification. Where the reported changes are found to have affected the NQF Level or Credit value of the qualification, the DFO reserves the right to schedule the qualification for re-validation.

Qualifications due for re-validation would be automatically scheduled based on the placement date. However, in case the re-validation is triggered from the institution's side, for any reason, including those mentioned above, before the end of the validity period, the institution should inform the DFO during the Annual Planning period. Where applicable, re-validation could also be conducted jointly with the GDR review.

The DFO has the right to *Archive* an institution and its qualifications from the NQF Register if the institution is no longer licensed/approved or has not passed its periodic quality assurance review (*refer to NQF General Policy 1*). Similarly, qualifications will be *Archived* if they are no longer valid (i.e. do not satisfy *Validation Standards*) or are discontinued and no longer delivered by the institution (*refer to NQF General Policy 3*). The DFO is responsible for ensuring the NQF Register remains up-to-date and accurate. *Further details are provided in Chapter 7: Monitoring and Review.*



Alignment of Foreign Qualifications

6. Alignment of Foreign Qualifications

This Chapter describes the arrangements of the DFO to the alignment of foreign qualifications to the NQF.

6.1 Introduction

Foreign qualifications that are delivered in the Kingdom of Bahrain and in line with specific alignment standards can be compared and evaluated against national qualifications by using the NQF as a comparison tool. This comparison with the NQF makes the value of a foreign qualification more understandable to employers and stakeholders within the education and training systems in the Kingdom.

The mechanism for alignment is developed in line with the *NQF General Policy 9: Alignment of Foreign Qualifications*.

6.2 Eligibility of the qualification for alignment to the NQF

To be eligible for the alignment to the NQF process, the qualifications have to meet the following eligibility criteria:

- The Qualification is a foreign qualification that needs to have learning outcomes, expressed in units/courses/modules, assessed, quality assured and certified.
- The Qualification is in compliance with the concerned regulatory body requirements, where applicable.
- The Qualification and/or its Provider(s) within the Kingdom of Bahrain passed the latest BQA Quality Assurance Review, where applicable.
- The Qualification is delivered in the Kingdom of Bahrain by at least one Provider that falls under the BQA remit.

6.3 Annual Planning & Scheduling

On an annual basis, the DFO will invite organisations – both awarding bodies and institutions – to consider submitting the NQF Annual Planning Survey prior to requesting to align qualifications to the NQF. This step may involve awareness activities conducted by the DFO, where required.

Upon receiving the NQF Annual Planning Survey, the DFO will schedule the organisations for the process of alignment in accordance with its operational plan. Where applicable, alignment could be conducted with GDR review.

6.4 Capacity Building

The DFO supports applicant organisations through capacity building, prior to submitting their *Alignment Request Form*, if required.

6.5 Request for Alignment Process

The alignment to NQF process is carried out by the DFO according to two methods depending on the applicant organizations, more details is specified in the coming sections. The alignment process relies highly on research and international communication to support this process. The alignment to NQF process is illustrated in **Figure 7**, while **Table 11** shows the estimated processing times required for the various steps in the process.

However, processing time may vary substantially from one case to another due to variables such as qualification size, discipline and origin. Also, in case of joint reviews and other special circumstances, deviation may occur.

Table 11. Processing Timeframe for Alignment Requests

Activity	Duration (Number of working days)
Administrative Check and Acknowledgment	5
Alignment Request Processing	
<i>If Processing carried by Panel</i>	20
<i>If Processing carried by DFO</i>	15
Report finalisation, internal quality assurance and factual accuracy	15

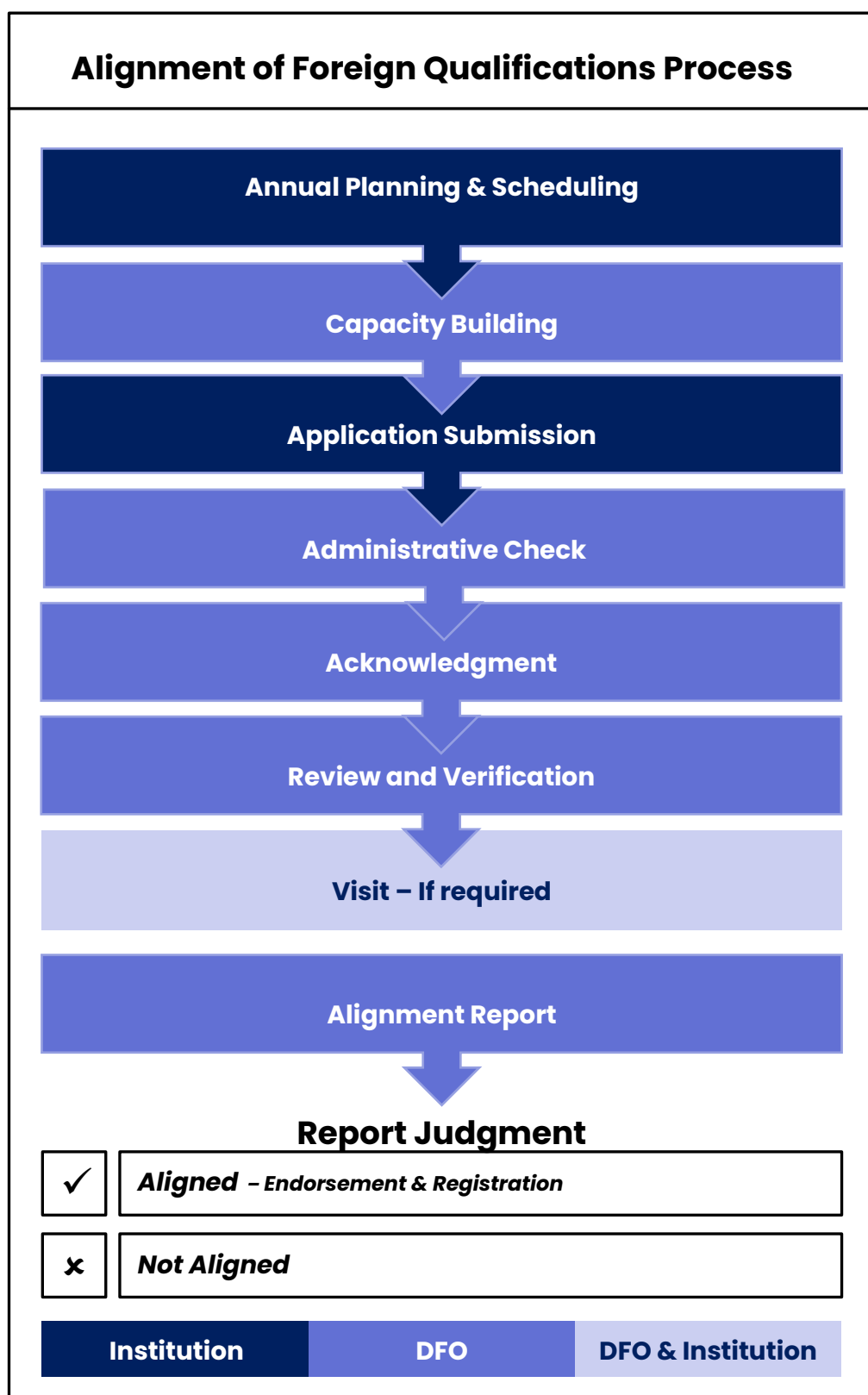


Figure 7 Illustration of Alignment of Foreign Qualifications Process

6.5.1 Alignment Request

Applicant organisation – awarding body or institution – is responsible to fill the Alignment Request Form selecting the appropriate Request Case. This could either be an institution in partnership with an awarding body when it is the only institution offering the qualification in the Kingdom of Bahrain (Request Case 1: Sole Provider) or an awarding body on behalf of several institutions offering the qualification in the Kingdom (Request Case 2: Awarding Body). In this case, the awarding body is responsible to ensure that providers of the qualification are aware of the process and final decision of alignment. Before submitting the *Alignment Request Form*, the applicant organisation must complete the service charge payment, following *BQA Service Charge Guidelines*.

The applicant organization should review the whole request form and ensure that it is free of error/s and include proper evidence indexing before submitting it to the DFO. The Alignment Request Form must be submitted to the DFO along with the supporting material in an electronic format.

6.5.2 Administrative Check

Upon receiving a *Request for Alignment* submission, the DFO will conduct an administrative check and provisionally evaluate the submission considering the following:

6.5.3.1 Eligibility of the qualification for alignment to the NQF

The Alignment Request Manager will check the eligibility of the qualification in accordance with the eligibility criteria. (*refer to section 6.2 Eligibility of the qualification for alignment to the NQF*).

6.5.3.2 Completeness of the Alignment Request Submission

The Alignment Request Manager will check the completeness and clarity of the Alignment Request form and supporting documentation.

During this step, where key documents are found to be missing or incomplete, the applicant organisation will be contacted and asked to supply the required information or evidence within an agreed timeframe.

In cases where an applicant organisation fails to complete their submission within the agreed timeframe and/or one of the eligibility criteria is not met, the DFO may resolve not to acknowledge the submission. This will be done by formally informing the applicant organisation of the preliminary review outcome and reasons of termination.

6.5.3 Acknowledgement

If the Alignment request successfully passed the *administrative check* and the outcome of the administrative check state that the Alignment request is eligible, complete, and ready for processing, the DFO will send an acknowledgement receipt to the applicant organisation within five working days. The purpose of this acknowledgement is to advise the organisation of the receipt date and provide contact details of the Alignment Request Manager responsible for the request.

6.5.4 Review and Verification of Qualification

Once the Alignment Request acknowledged by the DFO, the request will be going through verification that the level and credit values proposed are appropriate for alignment. Once this is completed, the request will be reviewed for compliance against the Alignment Standards (section 6.6). The DFO may communicate with the designated contact person of the Request for clarifications or extra evidence before the request is taken forward.

At this stage, the DFO will decide whether the Foreign Qualification being aligned should be reviewed and verified as a whole or down to comprising units/course/modules. This depends on whether the Qualification is included in/aligned to a QF that is **referenced** to the NQF or not. In this context, third-party referencing through the QFs that the NQF is formally referenced to, may be considered too. A Foreign Qualification that is included in/aligned to another QF that is **referenced** to the NQF will be reviewed and verified as a whole, while **if not, the process will go down to its comprising units/courses/modules**.

The Review and Verification can be carried out either by, the DFO or a convened panel, which includes representatives from the DFO. Such decision depends on whether the Qualification is included in/aligned to another QF or not;

6.5.4.1 The DFO will carry out the review and verification of the Alignment Request, when the Qualification is included in/aligned to another QF.

6.5.4.2 The DFO will appoint a panel¹⁵, which involves representatives from the DFO, to carry out the review and verification of the Alignment Request when the Qualification is not included in/aligned to another QF. In which case, a site visit may be required where applicable.

¹⁵ Panel selection and appointment will be in accordance with panel selection criteria listed in section 6.7.

If the review and verification of the proposed NQF Level and credit results in a decision that is different from the proposed alignment, this will be conveyed to the applicant organisation. In case of such disagreement, formal discussion may take place for a duration up to one month until an agreement may be reached.

6.6 Alignment Standards

Applicant organizations are required to provide sufficient evidence to support each of the Alignment Standards; There are four Alignment Standards; each comprises a set of indicators as follows:

Standard 1: Qualification Compliance

- **Indicator 1.1 Awarding Body Authorizations.** The applicant organisation should provide details of valid contract or agreement between the awarding body and provider(s) to deliver the qualification in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which has a minimum validity of six months in case of Vocational Education and Training and two years for Higher Education providers at the time of the submission, where applicable. The contract or agreement to state the ownership of the qualification and the provider, describe the formal relationship between the awarding body and provider; and describe the roles and responsibilities of each party.
- **Indicator 1.2 Qualification Licence and Approval.** The applicant organisation should provide details of any regulations the awarding body is obliged to follow in its home country or any affiliation with quality assurance bodies that may be in place. (*i.e. agreements, approvals, regulations manual... etc.*). Details of any regulations provider(s) are obliged to follow in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the type of licencing the provider acquired to operate and deliver the qualification.
- **Indicator 1.3 Qualification Access and Transfer.** The applicant organisation should provide details of the qualification's access (admission requirements), credit transfer (internal and external), Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and appeal against denial of access and credit transfer. These mechanisms should be specified clearly, documented and adhere to any national standard/requirement for the qualification. (*i.e. qualification admission criteria, samples of admission form, samples of credit transfer from and to the programme, samples of RPL request, and samples of appeal against admission and transfer*). Qualification admission criteria should be

communicated to learners (i.e. could be documented in the programme specification, catalogue or the awarding body's website).

Standard 2: Justification of Need

- **Indicator 2.1 Qualification Fitness for Actual and Tangible Need(s)/ Demand(s).** The applicant organisation should provide details on how the qualification is delivered in the Kingdom of Bahrain with consideration to fitness-for-purpose for market, learners and societal need(s) and demand(s); based on accurate and recent data source. (*i.e. national, regional and international market need studies, reports, laws, potential education progression route, employer survey, large employer requests, meeting minutes or any databases and research that support the need to this qualification*). The qualification structure and content should clearly match and relevant to the need(s)/ demand(s).
- **Indicator 2.1 Career Progression and Learning Pathways** .The applicant organisation should provide details of the qualification's career progression, potential occupation/s and educational pathway/s with tracking of the qualification's graduates per cohort, with particular emphasis on the employability rates, job type, employability timing and/or skills enhancements, where applicable. Information about any career counselling provided to learners to support their progression. (*i.e. graduate destination list and alumni surveys*). Career progression and educational pathways should be communicated to learners (*i.e. could be documented in the programme specification, catalogue or the awarding body's website*).

Standard 3: Quality Assurance

- **Indicator 3.1 Quality Assurance of Delivery.** The applicant organisation should provide details on the responsibilities and procedures in place to quality assure the delivery of the qualification, delivery mode (on-campus, online or blended) and qualification attendance mode (full time or part-time), including details of arrangement in place to ensure suitable adjustments are provided to learners with special needs admitted to the qualification, *where applicable*. (*i.e. learners request, special needs report or minutes of meetings, institution decision*). This should also cover how consistency is maintained across multiple providers. (*i.e. Agreements, approval documents, quality assurance manual, frameworks... etc.*).

- **Indicator 3.2 Quality Assurance of Assessment.** The applicant organisation should provide details on procedures in place regarding the responsibilities for conducting the assessment and its marking, mechanisms for verification of assessment and moderation of results, indicating frequency of such activities and how it is carried out. In addition, maintaining assessment integrity and what measures are taken regarding plagiarism and academic misconduct, *where applicable*, and the process of appeal against result. Learners should be aware of their right to appeal against result. (*i.e. samples of appeal against result forms*). This should also cover arrangements for the standardisation of assessment to ensure consistency is maintained across multiple providers. (*i.e. quality assurance manual, frameworks, external examiner reports, validation manual, student handbook... etc.*).
- **Indicator 3.3 Quality Assurance of Certification.** The applicant organisation should provide details on the responsibilities and procedures in place to quality assure the certification process of this qualification. This should also include how consistency is maintained across multiple providers. (*i.e. a sample certificate from each provider in addition to any other material that may include quality assurance manual, frameworks, certification procedure... etc.*).
- **Indicator 3.4 Monitoring and Review.** The applicant organisation should provide details on the responsibilities and procedures in place to for periodic monitoring and review of the qualification. (*i.e. quality assurance manual, review framework, feedback mechanisms... etc.*).

Standard 4: NQF Level and Credit Alignment

- **Indicator 4.1 NQF Level Alignment.** The applicant organisation should provide clear evidence and justification to ensure the appropriateness of the proposed level alignment for the overall qualification learning outcomes and its components of units/courses/modules. Also, details on how the overall level alignment have been reached. For example, equal components where all units are at the same level, proportionate where majority of units are at the level proposed for alignment or exit level where there is a required progression between components to achieve the qualification at the proposed alignment level. (*i.e. unit specifications/syllabi, mapping scorecards and programme structure section submitted as part of the application request form*). If the qualification is already included in other qualifications framework (QF), the NQF level alignment can be proposed through levels comparison between

two QFs; whether this QF is referenced to the NQF directly or through 3rd party referencing or in the existence of any formal agreement between QFs. Details and clear evidence on the qualification level allocated in the other QF and the method adopted to reach the overall NQF level alignment is required (*i.e. information on QF, country of origin, qualification level, qualification number, link to the QF register/database ... etc.*).

- **Indicator 4.2 NQF Credit Alignment.** The applicant organisation should provide clear evidence to ensure the appropriateness of the proposed credit alignment to the overall qualification learning outcomes and its components of units/courses/ modules. Also, details on how the overall credit alignment to the NQF have been reached. (*i.e. unit specifications/syllabi, mapping scorecards and programme structure section submitted as part of the application request form*). If the qualification is already included in other qualifications framework (QF), details and clear evidence on the allocation of the qualification credits on the other QF and the method adopted to reach the overall NQF credits alignment is required (*i.e. information on QF, country of origin, qualification level, qualification number, link to the QF register/database ... etc.*).

6.7 Panel Appointment

Where an Alignment Panel is required, the DFO will appoint and approve panel members as per the BQA guidelines. In addition to representatives from the DFO, the Panel comprises educationalists/trainers and business/industry professionals. Educationalists/trainers are academics, educators, teachers and/or trainers with experience in the relevant qualification sector and whom have qualifications of equal or above the level of the qualification being aligned. Business/industry professionals are employers or professionals with knowledge and experience of the sector.

6.8 Alignment Decision

The Request and supporting material are evaluated against each Alignment Standard requirement to decide on the degree of alignment as illustrated in **Table 12**.

Table 12. Alignment Standards Evaluation

Adequate Alignment	The Alignment Standard requirement is sufficiently addressed by the qualification, as evidenced by the submitted evidence and documentation.
Inadequate Alignment	The Alignment Standard requirement is insufficiently addressed by the qualification, as evidenced by the submitted evidence and documentation. The DFO/ Panel will indicate those aspects that need to be developed or revised to address the Alignment Standard requirement.

The overall decision on the Alignment Request is described in **Table 13**.

Table 13. Overall Alignment Decision

Aligned	Where there is Adequate Alignment to the requirements of all four Alignment Standards and there is agreement with the applicant organisation's proposed Alignment.
Not Aligned	Where there is Inadequate Alignment to the requirements of at least one Alignment Standard and there is disagreement with the applicant organisation's proposed Alignment.

6.9 Alignment Report

An Alignment Report will be produced, reviewed prior to sending it to the applicant organisation for factual accuracy check. This is not an opportunity for the applicant organisation to ask for changes to the conclusions or submit new evidence. Applicant organisations are given five working days to return to the DFO with any corrections of error of facts. At this point, organisations have the opportunity to appeal in line with the BQA policies and procedures.

6.10 Approval and Registration

An Alignment Request that has attained an overall decision of 'Aligned' will progress through to the approval stage:

- Recommendation of the Alignment Decision of the Qualification by the NAC.
- Approval of the Alignment Decision of the Qualification by the BOD.

- Endorsement of the Alignment Decision of the Qualification by the Cabinet.

Endorsed Alignment Decisions will be published on the NQF register in accordance with the BQA publication procedure. The Foreign Qualification title along with its owner/awarding body and providers will be shown on the BQA website. However, only providers who fulfil eligibility criteria (section 6.5.3.1) will be part of the publication process.

6.11 Re-validation and Archiving

The aligned qualification is to be re-validated in five years' time from the date of alignment. The DFO is responsible to arrange for such process in accordance with the applicant organization.

The DFO has the right to archive institution(s) or qualification(s) from the NQF Register if the institution is no longer licensed/approved or no longer operating. Similarly, qualifications will be archived if they are no longer valid (i.e. do not satisfy Alignment Standards) or are discontinued and no longer delivered in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The DFO is responsible for ensuring the NQF Register remains up-to-date and accurate.



Monitoring and Review

7. Monitoring and Review

This Chapter describes the monitoring and review of listed institutions, placed national qualifications and aligned foreign qualification on/to the NQF by the relevant BQA Directorates.

NQF General Policy 10 on CQI includes specific commitments to the DFO in relation to continuous quality improvement activities.

7.1 Annual Monitoring

- **Monitoring listed institutions:** on an annual basis and as part of broader quality assurance provision, the DFO will communicate with listed institutions to check whether any changes occurred regarding their formal arrangements related to the *Institutional Listing Standards*. Where a major or critical change(s) reported, the DFO reserves the right to request the institutions to submit a new *Institutional Listing Application*.
- **Monitoring placed qualifications:** on an annual basis, the DFO will communicate with institutions to check whether any changes occurred regarding their placed qualifications on the NQF. Where changes are planned or have taken place, its expected from institutions to inform the DFO about it, to allow a decision to be made on whether the changes have a significant effect on the agreed NQF Level and Credit value. Significant changes require that a qualification be re-validated.
- **Monitoring aligned qualifications:** on annual basis, the DFO will communicate with the applicant organizations to check whether any changes occurred regarding their qualifications aligned to the NQF. In addition, it is expected from awarding bodies and institutions to inform the DFO of any changes to the qualification that affect it NQF level and credit value, changes in approvals, license and agreement or termination of contract between them. Significant changes require that a qualification be re-validated.

7.2 Institution and Programme Review

As part of the normal cycle of the review of institutions and programmes, the relevant Directorate of the GDR will determine institutions' compliance with the requirements for institutional listing and the placement/alignment of qualifications on/to the NQF. The outcome of the review will effect on institution and qualification status on NQF Register as the following:

- If the institution does not pass the periodic GDR's quality review, its status on the NQF Register along with qualification(s) will be moved to the "Archived" status.
- If the qualification does not pass the periodic GDR's quality review, its status on the NQF Register will be moved to the "Archived" status.
- If the listed Institution and placed/aligned qualification pass the periodic GDR's quality review, their status on the NQF Register will be maintained as "Available" status.



Referencing the NQF

8. Referencing the NQF

This Chapter describes the arrangements of the DFO for the referencing of the NQF to other regional and international qualifications frameworks.

8.1 Purpose

Referencing the NQF is the process that leads to international recognition for the national qualifications. The objective of the reference activity of one qualifications framework to another is to enhance trust for the learners of qualifications who may be internationally mobile or those who use qualifications for international recruitment. In a referencing process, trust comes from a clear explanation of how qualifications levels in one country relate to those in another country.

The process should be based on a robust approach with clearly defined principles. The linking of the levels usually involves a technical approach that takes into account the words in the level descriptors and the meanings of the learning outcomes in each framework. In addition, sampling of qualifications in both frameworks may be done to verify this. Furthermore, quality assurance arrangements underlying both frameworks are analysed and compared.

The process also involves the stakeholders in both countries to ensure robustness and validity of outcomes. As there is a greater need for transparency of national qualifications systems, the referencing report is normally published after it goes through the approval process of each organisation.

In 2018, the NQF was formally referenced to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), using a specified set of principle.

8.2 Referencing Principles

The following referencing principles were used in the referencing process between the NQF and the SCQF. The principles are based on the referencing criteria for the European Qualifications Framework and on the criteria and processes that are used in self-certification of higher education frameworks to the Bologna cycles. The DFO uses these principles as guidelines for referencing activities with other qualifications frameworks.

Principle 1:

The roles and responsibilities of the relevant bodies and authorities are clear and transparent.

Principle 2:

Comparison of the qualifications frameworks demonstrates matching between the levels of the two frameworks.

Principle 3:

The qualifications frameworks are based on learning outcomes and, where these exist, credit systems and the recognition of credit.

Principle 4:

The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on qualifications frameworks are clear and transparent.

Principle 5:

Both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance and are consistent with international quality assurance principles.



Appendices

Appendix 1: NQF Credit Framework

1. Introduction

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was designed as a comprehensive 10-Level framework to classify qualifications provided by all education and training providers in the Kingdom of Bahrain. National qualifications are placed on the NQF and get allocated with an NQF Level and NQF Credit. Each level reflects the complexity of learning that a learner will be able to demonstrate by the end of the learning process – whether be it knowledge, skill or competence. Whereas NQF Credit, reflects the time needed by an average learner to achieve a set of learning outcomes designed for a specific qualification and/or its comprising units.

As part of the qualification placement process managed by the General Directorate of National Qualifications Framework & National Examinations (GDQ) of the Education & Training Quality Authority (BQA), all qualifications are subjected to a validation process to ensure their fitness-for-purpose. Provided Guidelines shall not to be used in isolation of NQF Level Descriptors and Validation Standards.

2. Credit Framework: The Guidelines

2.1 Qualifications' Titles and Description

2.1.1 Higher Education Qualifications' Titles¹⁶ and Description

a) Foundation Year

The range of Higher Education (HE) academic qualifications offered in the Kingdom of Bahrain starts with **the Foundation Year (Academic)** which sits on level 5 of the NQF and has a minimum duration of 120 NQF Credit. These qualifications can cover a range of subject areas while can also be focused on a certain discipline.

b) Diploma

HE academic qualifications offered in the Kingdom of Bahrain also include **Diploma** on level 6 of the NQF that has a minimum duration of 240 NQF Credit. These qualifications can cover a wide range of subject areas while can also be

¹⁶ If the Degree includes a minor field of specialisation, the title should reflect the content of both major and minor fields

focused on a certain discipline. Such qualifications are expected to be designed with appropriate linkage to National Occupational Standards (NOS).

c) **Associate Degree**

Associate Degree is an academic qualification which provides learners with the opportunity to leave university/college with a recognized intermediate qualification (exit qualification) allowing them to rejoin a HE programme leading to a bachelor's degree. This qualification sits on level 7 of the NQF and should have a learning volume extending to a minimum of 360 NQF credits. Such qualification should be designed to allow learners to continue education within a certain Bachelor programme by topping up to the remaining required credits. Hence, proper ties to possible further continuation of learning and other possible pathways –where applicable– should be considered in the design in addition to linkage to the NOS.

d) **Bachelor's Degree**

Within the scope of what is being offered in the market of qualifications it can be generalized that most bachelors come with specialization field such as Bachelor of Business, Bachelor of Law, and Bachelor of Engineering... etc. while the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science dominate the spectrum.

In coming to the title of a bachelor's degree and its effect on the design, it should be taken into account the differences of weight in focus in accordance with the type/title of the bachelor's degree. For instance, **Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.)** is usually for technical and specific areas and comes with focus on the theoretical part of technical and practical aspects. This is usually offered in the fields of technical and scientific areas such as: natural sciences, business sciences, engineering sciences... etc. Such qualification requires more credits that are directly linked to the major/discipline while little exposure to external topics. **Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)** is providing more expansive education and giving room for exposure to liberal arts subjects. This is usually offered in the fields of social sciences, humanities, linguistics, literature, history... etc. **Bachelor of Engineering (B. Eng.)** is usually more practically oriented. Although learners are introduced to main theories, the design comes with more focus and credits on applying theories and concepts. A Bachelor's Degree sits on level 8 of the NQF and have a minimum learning volume of 480 NQF credit, such qualifications should be designed with clear linkage to NOS and market needs (especially professional bodies) while maintaining proper alignment to its purpose (B.A., B.Sc., B.Eng... etc.).

A Bachelor of Medicine usually includes critical knowledge of human anatomy and physiology and a critical understanding of diseases, their causes, symptoms, and treatments. It also requires the use of professional clinical skills, such as examination, diagnosis, and patient management. Furthermore, it

requires learning the ethical and professional standards of medical practice and using a professional level of critical thinking and research in various medical settings. In addition, the **Bachelor of Medicine** lasts for more than four years with a total of 600+ NQF credits. Accordingly, with a higher learning complexity and learning volume, the **Bachelor of Medicine** sits on Level 9 of the NQF.

e) Postgraduate Diploma

Postgraduate Diploma is a continuation to the HE and requires a learner to have a bachelor's degree. Postgraduate Diploma sits on Level 9 of the NQF and has a volume of learning of a minimum of 72 NQF credit. This provides an opportunity for learners seeking postgraduate education in a related field of study and should be designed to include competencies of mastery level to allow learners to specialize and build on skills acquired through a bachelor's degree.

f) Master's Degree

Master's Degree, although may be a requirement for career advancement, especially academically, it is also an opportunity to further specialize in a particular topic or profession. Master's Degree sits on level 9 of the NQF and should be a minimum of 120 NQF credit. Such qualifications should be designed to specialize in a particular discipline and provide a professional level of skills and autonomy.

g) Doctoral Degree

Currently, there is a small number of Doctoral Degrees offered in Bahrain. A **Doctoral Degree** sits on level 10 of the NQF with majority of credits at level 10¹⁷ of the NQF.

2.1.2 Vocational Education and Training Qualifications' Titles and Description

a) Bahrain Vocational Qualifications

Bahrain Vocational Qualifications (BVQs) will be tentatively allocated to NQF range of levels¹⁸ as illustrated in figure 1. BVQs are competence-based qualifications which are delivered and assessed in the workplace. This is yet to be further studied during the design of the BVQs.

¹⁷ This is governed by the Validation Standards

¹⁸ This is subject to change in accordance with the BVQs development.

b) Awards

According to current licensing regulations for the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) has a category for short courses entitled: “**Local Achievement**”. These usually have a duration –not exceeding– of 60 contact hours as per MOL regulations. MOL allows also for long courses/programmes with more than 60 credit hours. These are provided with a pre-approval and cannot be offered until placed on the NQF, after which MOL will provide a final approval. The title ‘**Award**’ is introduced to cover the range of qualifications under these categories, which come at different levels of the NQF as illustrated in Figure 1. Awards should be designed to develop skills and knowledge in the vocational and training sector.

c) Professional Awards

Professional Awards are qualifications that sit at level 7, 8 and 9 of the NQF and have similar standards to those externally accredited. These are at a higher level of a specific profession and come as part of a career path for the purpose of extending or broadening knowledge and professional skills. Such qualifications would have a minimum NQF credit of 12. These should be aligned to international standards relevant to the profession and national standards.

d) Certificates

Certificates are a category of qualifications, with the prospect to provide progression pathway/route. Starting at level 1 of the NQF as illustrated in figure 1 and flexible in terms of covering a wide range of disciplines. Certificate 1 & 2 would be advantageous specifically for special needs learners with the purpose of including them in the system and providing them with access to a progressive route. Furthermore, these must be linked to the NOS and directly related to a vocational discipline/area. Certificates sit at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the NQF, while the Advanced Certificate sits at level 5. Certificates 1 and 2 would have NQF credits between 60 to 120, whereas the others would have a minimum of 120 NQF credits.

e) National Diploma

National Diploma (ND) sits on level 6 of the NQF and typically has a minimum of 120 NQF Credits. It is designed to provide learners with theoretical knowledge with emphasis on practical skills in a particular discipline/area in the vocational sector. Such qualifications should be linked to the NOS.

f) Higher National Diploma

Higher National Diploma (HND) extends the pathway for vocational qualifications. HND sits on Level 7 of the NQF with a minimum duration of 240 NQF credit. HNDs are a higher level to ND and are designed to provide learners with theoretical knowledge with emphasis on practical skills in a particular

discipline/area in the vocational sector. Such qualifications should be linked to the NOS.

2.1.3 General Education Qualifications' Titles and Description¹⁹

a) Access

In accordance with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bahrain²⁰, basic education (up to Grade 9) is compulsory, this is to combat illiteracy. The purpose of **Access** qualifications is to allow learners who require special education support and learners who have no formal qualifications to complete their learning across potential possible pathways. Access 1 sits on level 1 of the NQF and Access 2 sits on level 2 of the NQF.

b) Intermediate Certification Qualification

Intermediate Certification Qualification is defined as Grade 9 in accordance with Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum/system or equivalent in private schools' curriculum. Intermediate Certification sits on Level 3 of the NQF and is designed to provide a stepping-stone to School Graduation Qualifications and VET qualifications.

c) School Graduation Qualification

School Graduation Qualification is known as Grade 12 (Secondary School Certificate), or equivalent in private schools, are the basic pivot to entering HE programmes. These are designed to provide general background in several disciplines to prepare learners to pursue further/tertiary education and have a typical volume of 3 years of study to achieve Level 4 of the NQF.

In addition, there are several tracks provided by MOE schools in the technical education sector –VET. These are designed to sit on the same NQF level (Level 4) and provide the option to either pursue further education –be it vocational, professional or higher education– or directly engage in an occupation, Unlike Grade 12 (and equivalent) technical school curricula should be linked to NOS, given their nature of study and progression opportunities.

d) Advanced Graduation Qualifications

Advanced Graduation Qualifications are designed to include higher level specialized subjects at level 5 of the NQF providing one step further to entering Higher Education undergraduate programmes with a chance of exemption from

¹⁹ These are preliminary and provisional

²⁰ Bahrain Constitution, Chapter II, Article 7

year one equivalent subjects. Advanced Certificate sits on Level 5 of the NQF and has a typical volume of learning of 3 years from Grade 9 equivalent.

2.1.4 Micro-Credentials Titles and Description

Micro-credentials (MC) are defined as small units of learning with specific characteristics and purpose; their characteristics include having a short duration, being offered across all subject areas, being offered in any setting in which learning may occur and being engaged with the industry. There are two main forms of Micro-credentials, including Credit Bearing MC and Non-credit Bearing MC. Only Credit Bearing MCs are placed on the NQF. MC should adhere to the regulatory/awarding body requirements and the *NQF qualification design requirements*. The MC may be vocational or academic and designed at any NQF Level. The MC credit requirements are defined by the regulatory/awarding bodies. The title of the MC is distinguished by adding a prefix of MC.

2.1.5 Apprenticeship Qualifications Titles and Description

Apprenticeship qualifications are formal outcome-based learning and training that combine learning that occurs in the education training institution with substantial work-based learning in the workplace. The apprenticeship qualifications are mainly vocational in nature; however, they may lead to applied academic degrees. The apprenticeship qualifications requirements and specifications are defined by the regulatory/awarding bodies.

2.2 Allocation of Qualifications on the NQF

Figure 1 below demonstrates the allocation of Qualifications on the NQF.

Level	Academic	Vocational (inclusive of Special Needs)		
10	Doctoral Degree			
9	Master's Degree Postgraduate Diploma	BVQs		Professional award L9
8	Bachelor's Degree			Professional award L8
7	Associate Degree		HND	Professional award L7
6	Diploma		ND	Award L6
5	Advanced Graduation Qualifications, Foundation Year		Advanced Certificate	Award L5

4	School Graduation Qualification		Certificate 4	Award L4
3	Intermediate Certification		Certificate 3	Award L3
2	Access 2		Certificate 2	
1	Access 1		Certificate 1	

Figure 1: Allocation of qualifications on the NQF

2.3 Qualifications' Credit Description

Table 1 shows the credit framework/description of qualifications on the NQF. It is important to note that this description is to be used hand in hand with the requirements of the Validation Standards and Level Descriptors. Specifically, standards 2, 3 & 5 (Qualifications Compliance, Appropriateness of Qualification Design, Content and Structure, and Appropriateness of NQF Level and Credit). The level of the remaining composite units and how it contributes to the design and the purpose of the qualifications will be subject to the qualification placement judgement with consideration to progression between units as appropriate.

Table 1 Qualifications' Credit description²¹

Qualification Title	Sector	Status	NQF Level	NQF Credit	
				Overall Credit	Credit Description
Doctoral Degree	HE	Currently Licensed at 45 USCS ²²	10	----	Majority of Credits at level 10
Master's Degree	HE	Currently Licensed at 30 USCS	9	Min of 120 in total	At least 85% of total credits at level 9 or above
Postgraduate Diploma	HE	Currently Licensed at 18 USCS	9	Min of 72 in total	At least 85% of total credit at level 9 or above
Professional Award L9	VET	-----	9	Min of 12 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 9 or above

²¹ These are general guidelines, while institutions have autonomy on the distribution of credits within the specified guidelines, credits from a higher level may be included as long as proper progression is maintained within the design.

²² United States Credit System

Bachelor's Degree	HE	Currently Licensed at 120 USCS	8	Min of 480 in total	At least 25% of total credit at level 8 or above Should not include more than 20% of total credit at level 5 ²³
Professional Award L8	VET	-----	8	Min of 12 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 8 or above
Associate Degree	HE		7	Min of 360 in total	At least 35% of total credit at level 7 or above Should not include more than 15% of total credit at a level below level 6
Professional award L7	VET	-----	7	Min of 12 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 7 or above
HND	VET	-----	7	Min of 240 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 7 or above
Diploma	HE		6	Min of 240 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 6 or above
Award L6	VET		6	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% at level 6 or above
ND	VET	-----	6	Min of 120 in total	At least 75% of total credit at level 6 or above
Advanced Graduation Qualifications	GE	Currently at 3 yr from G9 equivalent	5	-----	Min of 1 yr. at level 5 Should not include any credits at level 3 or below
Foundation Year	HE		5	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% at level 5 or above
Award L5	VET		5	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% at of total credit level 5 or above
Advanced Certificate	VET	-----	5	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 5 or above

²³ Any presence of credits below level 5 (i.e. level 4), will have to be clearly justified and evidenced.

School Graduation Qualification G12 and Equivalent	GE	Currently at 3 yr from G9 or equivalent	4	-----	Max of 10% at level 5 Min of 80% at level 4 Max of 10% at level 3
School Graduation Qualification: Technical Education qualification (Advanced Apprenticeship)	GE/VET	Currently at 3 yr from G9 or equivalent	4	-----	Max of 10% at level 5 Min of 80% at level 4 Max of 10% at level 3
School Graduation Qualification: Technical Education qualification (Apprenticeship)	GE/VET	Currently at 2 yr from G9 or equivalent	4	-----	Min of 85% at level 4 Max of 15% at level 3
Award L4	VET		4	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% at of total credit level 4 or above
Certificate 4	VET	-----	4	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 4 or above
Intermediate Certification and equivalent	GE	Currently at 3 yr	3	-----	Max of 5% at level 4 Min of 80% at level 3 Max of 15% at level 2
Award L3	VET		3	Max of 60 hours equivalent in NQF credit (can be more under licencing body specifications)	At least 50% of total credit at level 3 or above
Certificate 3	VET	-----	3	Min of 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 3 or above
Access 2	GE	-----	2	-----	-----
Certificate 2	VET	-----	2	60 to 120 in total	At least 50% of total credit at level 2 or above
Access 1	GE	-----	1	-----	-----
Certificate 1	VET	-----	1	60 to 120 in total	Max of 25% at level 2

Appendix 2: NQF Level Descriptors

Each of the ten levels of the NQF is identified by a unique *level descriptor* comprising three separate strands that cover *Knowledge, Skills and Competence*. The strands are further divided into five sub-strands. The strands and sub-strands are detailed in the following table.

1. Knowledge – Theoretical Understanding

Knowledge includes underpinning theory and concepts as well as the implicit knowledge gained as a result of performing certain tasks. Understanding refers to a more holistic knowledge of processes and contexts and may be distinguished as know-why as opposed to know-that. NQF levels start with a basic knowledge of facts and progress to a point where learners are required to reflect on that body of knowledge, reason why it is correct or incorrect, and adapt or develop new knowledge accordingly.

2. Knowledge – Applied Knowledge

Competent practice comes through the application of knowledge and understanding. This involves being able to contextualise knowledge to apply it in a variety of different situations and practices. NQF levels progress from relating knowledge of a few simple everyday contexts to using a range of complex skills, techniques and practices. Learners demonstrate originality and creativity in the development and application of new knowledge and understanding.

3. Skills – Generic Problem Solving and Analytical Skills

Generic problem solving, and analytical skills involve the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thoughts, experiences and senses. It includes the ability to: solve problems/issues and challenges; use creativity and innovation; respond to change, monitor; and, evaluate and promote continuous improvement. Generic problem solving, and analytical skills tend to be transferable, i.e. once they have been developed, they can be applied to different situations and job roles. NQF levels progress from receiving encouragement and support to dealing with everyday situations, to critically analysing and evaluating complex situations or issues and developing original and creative responses.

4. Skills – Communication, ICT and Numeracy

Skills in communication, ICT and numeracy are essential for effective practice and underpin many roles and/or tasks. However, it is not always necessary to have skills in all three areas of communication, ICT and numeracy, nor is it necessarily a requirement to have an equal level of skill in all three. Although work roles,

education and training will have specific communication, ICT and numeracy requirements, many of these skills are generic and can be transferred across different roles within institutions or fields of work.

5. Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility and Context

Autonomy, responsibility and context relate to the nature of working relationships, levels of responsibility for self and for others, managing change, and ways in which individuals work and the impact this has on their job and on other individuals. Human situations, whether occupational, social or civic, supply the context within which knowledge and skills are deployed for practical purposes. Such situations range in complexity, and hence in the demands, they place upon the individual. The range of responses required, and the extent to which a broader range or higher level of knowledge and skill have to be drawn upon, also depends on the level of predictability of the context. NQF levels progress from working alone on simple and routine tasks under direct supervision to becoming increasingly autonomous and accountable, becoming more independent and/or more focused on management and leadership, increasingly self-critical and being able to reflect on ethical and professional issues. They also progress from defined and structured situations or contexts that constrain the behaviour of the individual to acting effectively and autonomously in complex, ill-defined and unpredictable situations or contexts.

NQF Level Descriptors

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
1	In a subject/discipline, demonstrate elementary knowledge of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some simple facts. 	With encouragement and support, use simple skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete every day simple tasks; recognise and use safely and under supervision, the most common basic tools and materials. 	With encouragement and support, use well-defined stages to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> solve very simple problems; recognise some identified consequences of actions or inaction. 	With support, use simple skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and respond to very simple written and/or oral communication; carry out very simple tasks with information and data; interpret a narrow range of very simple and familiar data. 	Operate under supervision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in everyday contexts; in highly organised and well-defined contexts.
2	In a subject/discipline, demonstrate elementary knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some simple facts and ideas. 	With support, use simple skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete familiar, simple, pre-planned tasks; use safely and under supervision, common basic 	With support, use well-defined stages to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify a process to deal with simple, familiar situations or issues; 	Use elementary skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and respond to simple written and oral communication; carry out simple tasks to access information and process data; 	Operate under supervision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in simple, familiar and routine contexts; in pre-planned and defined contexts.

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
		tools and materials effectively .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognise identified consequences of actions or inaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interpret a limited range of simple and familiar numerical and graphical data 	
3	<p>In and associated with a subject/discipline, demonstrate basic, mainly factual knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> simple facts and ideas; some basic processes, materials and/or terminology. 	<p>Use simple skills and some basic skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete familiar, simple tasks that are routine; select and use safely, with little supervision, basic tools and materials effectively. 	<p>With little support, use known stages of a problem-solving approach to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deal with simple situations, issues and/or problems; identify the consequences of actions or inaction. 	<p>Use simple skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and respond to simple but detailed written and oral communication; access features of familiar applications to obtain information and process data; interpret familiar, uncomplicated numerical and graphical data. 	<p>Operate under little supervision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in, familiar and routine contexts; with little independence and limited responsibility.
4	<p>Associated with a subject/discipline, demonstrate basic knowledge and understanding of:</p>	<p>Use basic skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> plan and organise familiar tasks; 	<p>With minimal support, use problem-solving approaches to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deal with familiar and unfamiliar 	<p>Use basic skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> produce and respond to familiar detailed 	<p>Operate with minimal supervision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in familiar and some unfamiliar contexts;

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a range of facts and ideas; basic processes, materials and/or terminology; some of the main theories and concepts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relate to some of the main theories and concepts; complete familiar and unfamiliar tasks that have some non-routine elements; select and use tools and materials safely and effectively with minimal supervision, making adjustments where necessary. 	<p>situations, issues and/or problems;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make generalisations and draw conclusions in defined situations. 	<p>written and oral communication;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access features of standard applications to obtain and combine information and process data; interpret and use routine, numerical and graphical data that has a little complexity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> with some independence and responsibility.
5	Associated with a subject/discipline, demonstrate generalised knowledge and understanding of:	Use basic skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> plan and organise familiar and new tasks; 	With some guidance, obtain, organise and use information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deal with defined routine situations, 	Use basic skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> produce and respond to familiar and unfamiliar written 	Operate with some guidance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in familiar and unfamiliar contexts;

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a wide range of facts and ideas; processes, materials, properties, practices, techniques and/or terminology; the main theories and concepts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relate to the main theories and concepts; complete routine and non-routine tasks; adapt, as necessary, processes, practices, techniques tools and/or materials to deal with defined routine situations, issues and/or problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> issues and/or problems; make generalisations and predictions to draw conclusions and suggest solutions in defined situations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and oral communication some of which is detailed; select and use standard applications to obtain and combine information and process data; interpret and use routine and non-routine numerical and graphical data that has some complexity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in carrying out routine and non-routine tasks; with independence taking responsibility for the nature and quality of output.
6	Associated with a subject/discipline, demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding, which is embedded in the	Use basic skills and some advanced skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> plan and organise familiar and new tasks, some of 	Use and organise information to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deal with defined and some undefined 	Use basic and some advanced skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate clearly in a well-structured manner to convey 	Operate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in familiar and unfamiliar contexts; in defined and some undefined areas of

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<p>main theories, principles and concepts and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> facts and ideas; processes, materials, properties, practices, techniques and/or terminology; the dynamic nature of the subject/discipline; the difference between explanations based on evidence and/or research and other forms of explanations. 	<p>which are at an advanced level;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> relate to the main theories and concepts; complete routine, non-routine and some advanced level tasks; adapt, as necessary, processes, practices, techniques, tools and/or materials to deal with defined and some undefined situations, issues and/or problems. 	<p>situations, issues and/or problems;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas. 	<p>complex information and ideas;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> select and use standard applications to obtain and combine a variety of information and process data; combine numerical and graphical data to measure progress against targets/goals. 	<p>work and/or application of resources;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> with independence taking responsibility for the nature and quality of output with accountability for determining and achieving personal outcomes.

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associated with a subject/discipline, demonstrate advanced knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> processes, materials, properties, practices, techniques, conventions and/or terminology; the core theories, principles and concepts; its specialisations, scope and 	Use advanced-level and some specialist-level skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> plan and organise advanced-level tasks; relate to the core theories and concepts; adapt, as necessary, processes, practices, techniques, tools and/or materials to deal with defined and undefined situations, issues and/or problems; apply some research or 	Use a range of approaches to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> undertake analysis, evaluation and/or synthesise information and concepts, within the common understanding of the subject/discipline; critically evaluate evidence; formulate evidence-based solutions. 	Use advanced-level skills to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate clearly in a well-structured manner to convey complex information and ideas, adapting the message to the requirements and level of the target audience; select and use standard applications, and some specialised applications, to obtain and combine a variety of information and process data; interpret and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress 	Operate at an advanced-level : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in variable contexts; in defined and undefined areas of work; with some responsibility for the work of others; with accountability for determining and achieving personal and group outcomes.

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<p>defining features;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ some major current issues. ▪ Demonstrate general knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – some research methods and/or other investigative techniques. 	<p>investigation elements to deal with advanced level situations, issues and/or problems.</p>		<p>against targets/goals.</p>	
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Associated with a subject/ discipline, demonstrate critical knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ processes, materials, properties, 	<p>Use specialised-level skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ deal with advanced and some complex situations and/or problems that have an element 	<p>Use a range of approaches to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ critically analyse, evaluate /or synthesise information, concepts, skills and practices in a subject/discipline to 	<p>Use specialised-level skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ communicate with peers, senior colleagues and specialists; ▪ make formal presentations about specialised topics, 	<p>Operate at a specialised-level level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ in variable contexts that have some unpredictability; ▪ in some complex areas of work;

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<p>practices techniques, features, conventions and/or terminology;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ some specialised theories, principles and concepts; ▪ of major current issues; ▪ that integrates the core theories, principles, and concepts. <p>▪ Demonstrate detailed knowledge</p>	<p>of unpredictability;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ relate to and adapt some specialised theories and concepts; ▪ apply standard research or investigative methods; ▪ plan and undertake defined projects of development, research or investigation into special situations, issues and/or problems. 	<p>identify and define situations, issues and/or problems;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ demonstrate insight, interpretation and creativity to complex situations, issues and/or problems; ▪ identify and implement relevant solutions; ▪ make informed judgments in situations where data/information is limited and/or comes from a variety of sources. 	<p>adapting the message to the audience as appropriate;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ select and use standard and specialised applications; ▪ specify refinements and/or improvements to applications as required; ▪ interpret and evaluate numerical and graphical data to establish targets and measure progress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ with significant responsibility for the work of others; ▪ lead multiple groups and projects with decision-making responsibilities.

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<p>and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one or more specialisations in the subject/discipline; the established research methods and/or investigative techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate creativity in the application of knowledge, understanding and/or practices. 			
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Associated with a subject/discipline, demonstrate critical knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> processes, materials, properties, 	<p>Use professional-level skills which are at, or informed by, developments at the forefront of the subject/discipline to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deal with complex, unpredictable situations, issues and/or problems; 	<p>Use a combination of approaches to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise information that extends existing knowledge and concepts of the subject/discipline; identify, 	<p>Use professional-level skills to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> select appropriate means to communicate with a range of audiences with different levels of 	<p>Operate at a professional level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in variable contexts that are often complex, unpredictable and not clearly defined; with substantial responsibility for the

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	<p>practices, techniques, features, conventions and terminology;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> specialised theories, principles and concepts; major current issues in the subject/discipline and its specialisations; that integrates the core theories, some specialised theories, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> relate to and adapt specialised theories and concepts; apply standard and specialised research methods and/or investigative techniques; plan and undertake significant projects of development, research or investigation into new situations, issues and/or problems. 	<p>conceptualise and define new and abstract problems;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate professional levels of insight, interpretation, creativity and originality to complex situations, issues and/or problems; make informed judgments in situations where data/information is limited and/or inconsistent. 	<p>knowledge/expertise ;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate with peers, more senior colleagues and specialists; have in-depth knowledge of appropriate applications to support and enhance work at this level; specify refinements and/or improvements to applications to increase effectiveness; undertake a critical evaluation of a wide 	<p>work of individuals and groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> initiate and lead activities/projects/work. taking part in strategic decision making.

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<p>principles and concepts;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrates extensive detailed knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – one or more specialisations in the subject/discipline which is informed by developments at the forefront; – the established and specialised research methods and/or investigative techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ demonstrate creativity or originality in the application of knowledge understanding and/or practices. 		<p>variety of numerical and graphical data.</p>	

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the forefront of a subject/discipline, demonstrate detailed critical knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> processes, materials, properties, practices, techniques, features, conventions and terminology; leading principal and specialised theories, principles and concepts. 	Use highly specialised and expert skills which are at, or informed by developments at the forefront of the subject/discipline to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> deal with new and unfamiliar, complex situations and/or issues that are unpredictable; apply standard and specialised research methods and/or investigative techniques; relate to and adapt leading principal and specialised theories and concepts; plan and 	Improvise and use a combination of approaches to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> critically analyse, evaluate and/or synthesise very complex ideas and information to develop creative and original responses to very complex and/or new situations, issues and/or problems; make informed judgments in situations where data/information is very limited and/or inconsistent. 	Use a significant range of professional-level skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate at an appropriate level to a range of audiences and adapt communication to context and purpose; communicate results of research and innovation to peers and others; engage in critical dialogue; use a range of applications to support and enhance work; 	Operate at an expert-level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in variable contexts that are complex, unpredictable and not clearly defined; with sole responsibility and accountability for the outcome of individuals, groups and projects. originate and lead complex activities/projects/work. taking strategic decisions.

NQF Level	Knowledge: Theoretical Understanding	Knowledge: Applied Knowledge	Skills: Generic Problem Solving & Analytical skills	Skills: Communication, ICT, and Numeracy	Competence: Autonomy, Responsibility & Context
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate extensive detailed and often leading knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one or more specialisations generated through personal research or investigative work that makes a significant contribution to existing knowledge and practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> undertake an extensive project of development, research or investigations into new and leading situations, issues and problems. demonstrate creativity and originality in the development and application of new knowledge understanding and/or practices. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> critically evaluate numerical and graphical data. 	